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# The Bankslanders: Economy and Ecology of a Frontier Trapping Community

Volume 3 - The Community

By Peter J. Usher

NSRG 71-3

NORTHERN SCIENCE RESEARCH GROUP: DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT



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**THE BANKSLANDERS:  
ECONOMY AND ECOLOGY OF A  
FRONTIER TRAPPING COMMUNITY  
VOLUME 3—THE COMMUNITY**

**by**

**PETER J. USHER**

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Requests for copies of this report should be addressed to the Chief, Northern Science Research Group, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa.

*Canada*

Issued under the Authority of the  
Honourable Jean Chrétien, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development

Northern Science Research Group  
Department of Indian Affairs  
and Northern Development  
Ottawa, October, 1971

Information Canada  
Ottawa, 1971  
Cat. No.: R72-6370/3  
IAND Publication No. QS-1168-000-EE-A-1



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## **ABSTRACT**

Fur trapping, for generations the chief source of income for native people in northern Canada, has seriously declined in recent years. An outstanding exception is the community of Sachs Harbour, Banks Island, N.W.T., where several thousand arctic fox pelts are harvested annually by fifteen to twenty trappers.

This study analyzes three topics: the cultural ecology of the colonization of Banks Island as a trapping frontier; the economic geography of trapping and hunting there, and the current status and future prospects of the community of Sachs Harbour. Its purposes are to investigate the ecologic, economic and social basis of trapping, to understand trapping as an adaptive strategy in particular historical circumstances, and to analyze it as a viable resource system.

## **Volume Three**

The current status and future prospects of the community of Sachs Harbour are analyzed in the context of a metropolis-hinterland model. The social characteristics of the community in the mid-1960s are outlined. The recent extension of government services and administration to Sachs Harbour and the oil exploration controversy of 1970 are discussed and analyzed. It is concluded that fur-trapping communities such as Sachs Harbour are viable from an ecologic and economic point of view, but that new social and political developments in the North threaten their future. Recommendations are made, calling for the modernization and re-establishment of the fur industry; for decentralization of decision-making to the community level in order to permit local autonomy and control, and for a moratorium on non-renewable resource development in native trapping and hunting areas pending adequate research and consultation.



## PREFACE

This is the third and final volume on the economy and ecology of the trapping community of Sachs Harbour, Banks Island, Northwest Territories. The series is based largely on a doctoral thesis in geography for the University of British Columbia (Usher, 1970a). This volume, however, incorporates much new material, and only Chapters One and Four are drawn from the thesis. This new material relates to recent government activity, and particularly to the oil exploration controversy of 1970. It is based on research conducted chiefly during brief visits to Sachs Harbour and Inuvik in 1969, 1970 and 1971.

Two points should be borne in mind when reading this volume, one relating to methodology and the other to content. The social scientist is expected to employ accepted scientific methods in collecting and analyzing his data. His hypotheses must be testable and his arguments logical, and he must not dismiss alternative explanations without proper examination. This does not mean, however, that his analysis is "objective" or value free. Indeed it cannot be, nor ought it to be so. The ultimate application of social science is in the solution of social problems, and these can be neither identified nor solved without reference to personal and societal values.

Rare is the social scientist who, having been closely involved with the subjects of his investigation, does not also have very deep feelings about them. He has been a guest, and to some degree perhaps a member, of their community. If he perceives that the community and its way of life are valued by its members, and if he himself values these things, he will naturally be concerned for the continued well-being of that community. This does not invalidate his research findings, so long as he has abided by the scientific obligations outlined above. Since I have been associated with the community of Sachs Harbour over a period of six years, I have not written a value-neutral report. I can only express the belief that my biases have not caused me to obscure or ignore pertinent data or conclusions.

The second point concerns the subject matter treated in this volume. In the previous volumes, the history, economy and ecology of the Banks Island community have been analyzed largely within the context of the Western Arctic region of Canada, although on occasion broader topics such as the general status of the fur industry have been examined. Yet the present day community of Sachs Harbour does not exist in isolation, and its future prospects are now governed principally by external forces. The resource conflict of 1970 cannot be understood solely through an analysis of the Banks Island community itself. One must also examine the nature of the metropolitan forces impinging upon it, such as government and corporate bureaucracies, and the perceptions of northern development held by the government and the public. Whether through conscious taboo or failure to see the significance of one's own acts, this is not usually done in government reports of this type. But the purpose of this report is not simply to interpret the Bankslanders to the bureaucracy, but also to interpret the bureaucracy to the Bankslanders, to other northerners and indeed other Canadians. Knowledge is power, and the unequal distribution of one entails the unequal distribution of the other. This report, and particularly its recommendations, are offered in the belief that northern development, however that elusive concept may be defined, can some day occur by the common consent and desire of all concerned.

Peter J. Usher  
Ottawa, October, 1971.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Further to the acknowledgements given in Volume One I wish to thank the following individuals for their critical evaluation of all or parts of this volume in its draft stages: Arnold Cragg, Keith Crowe, Marg Dahl, Jake Hendricks, Moose Kerr, Nick Novakowski, George Parsons, Graham Rowley, Donat Savoie, Walter Slipchenko, Natalie Stoddard, George Thompson and Jean Usher. Research and reflection are inevitably collective efforts, and indeed are the better for being so.

Peter J. Usher



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## CHAPTER ONE

### SACHS HARBOUR: 1965-1967\*

For an outsider, arrival at Sachs Harbour is exciting, whether for the first visit or the tenth. Almost all aircraft now come in on the gravel strip which straddles the ridge above the village, although it is not so long since they landed on the ice or water surface of the harbour. In winter, as the aircraft comes to a halt, one peers into the twilight and the blowing snow, and there at the edge of the strip are a dozen dogteams lined up. No manner of bitter weather prevents the people from coming to the plane, for especially in winter its arrival is an important event. Mail arrives, parcels come from relatives in Inuvik or Tuktoyaktuk, or there may be special orders to pick up—a box of traps, a bottle of rye whiskey perhaps, or a new radio. The trappers also bring bales of fur to the aircraft, for on this run the southbound freight is often more valuable than that which comes in.

In summer, when walking down the hill from the air strip, one sees that the thin cover of moss and lichen is insufficient to hide the pale brown earth. Soil stripes have developed on the hillside, giving the land the appearance of flowing gently down to the sea. The road, which connects the village, the airstrip and the weather station, is the only one on the island. Even the village itself is without streets.

#### The village

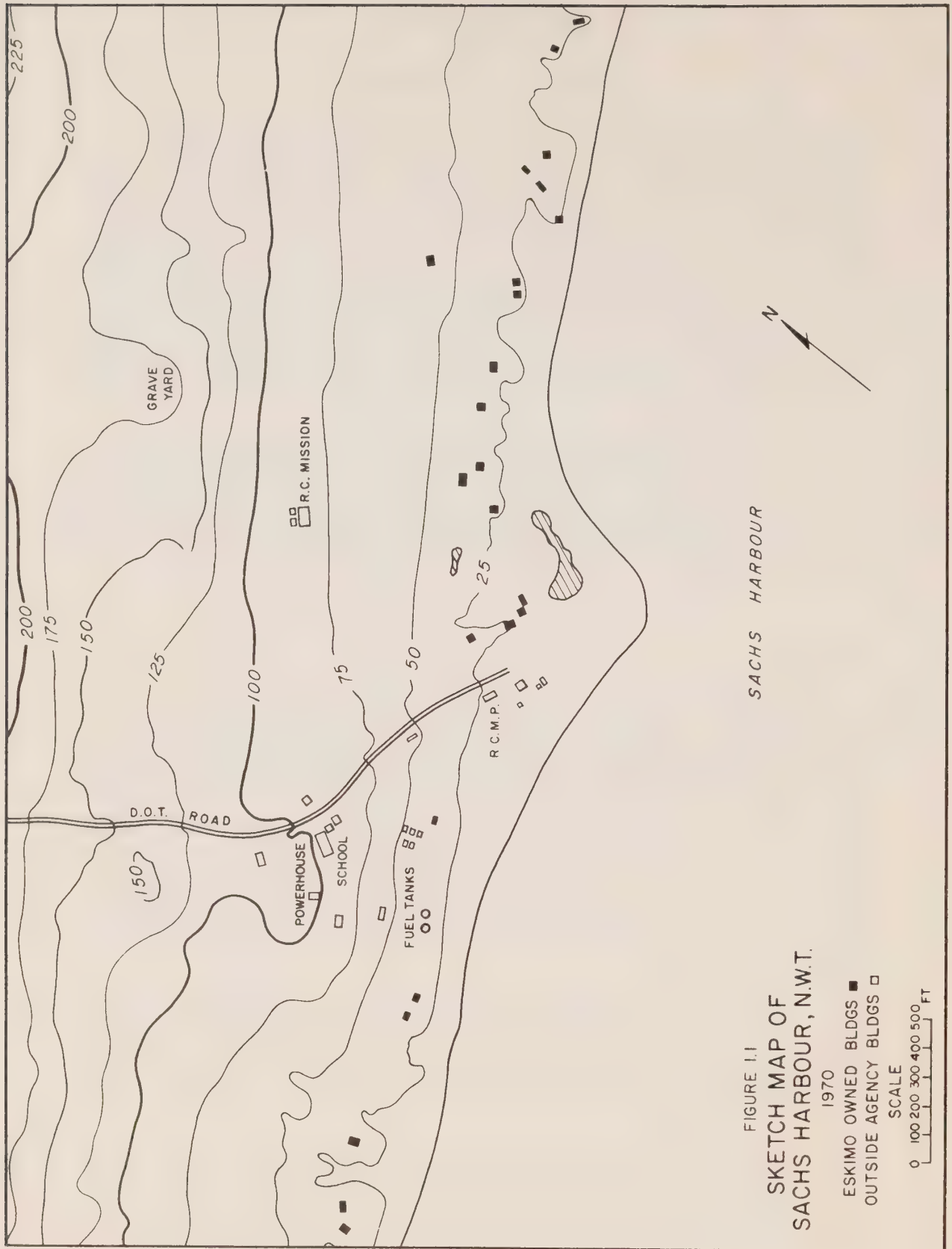
At the crest of a knoll on the hillside, the entire village<sup>1</sup> comes into view. Twenty or so buildings are strung out along the shore, covering almost a mile of waterfront. At first glance this may seem an incongruous arrangement in such a harsh, unsheltered and isolated locale, but each family needs both waterfront space and social space. Most of the buildings are small frame houses, each with a small tent or two nearby, a few oil drums outside, a dog team chained up, perhaps some spare lumber or sheeting lying around, and some clothes drying on a line. As of 1967, there were also two larger complexes: the Royal Canadian Mounted Police barracks at the foot of the road, and the Roman Catholic Mission beneath the bluff. And, looking back beyond the end of the airstrip, quite separate from the village, were the orange and white buildings of the weather station.

The native houses are of frame and plywood construction. Although small, they are well insulated and strongly built, with large exterior porches. Most men have had some practical carpentry experience and are proud of the buildings which they design and construct themselves. Heating oil is the standard fuel, all houses being equipped with oil stoves and space heaters.

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\*This chapter seeks to portray conditions at Sachs Harbour as they were during the mid-1960s. It is written with reference to that period and to the problems and prospects of the village as they appeared then. The more general observations are still valid and are discussed in the present tense.

<sup>1</sup>A more complete description of the village has been given in a previous report (Usher, 1966).



Inside, the houses are divided into a large front room and one or two separate bedrooms. Besides the oil range, the front room normally contains a “chrome set” of kitchen table and chairs, a couch, prefabricated kitchen cupboards and a formica counter with a basin, all ordered by catalogue from outside. On the walls may be a picture or two, as well as a religious motto or object. Most front rooms are kept clean and orderly, which is an achievement since the children play in them, the men use them as workrooms for repairing engines and other gear, foxes are skinned, dried and floured in them, and the women use them for cooking, sewing and washing clothes. Moreover, tea is usually on the stove and bannock is ready, for virtually all the social life of the village takes place in these front rooms.

There was no water supply system as of 1967, nor was there any organized garbage or sewage disposal at Sachs Harbour. Water was obtained from lake ice, river water or snow, depending on the season. Waste was incinerated or dumped in the harbour.

Electricity was not available for general use in Sachs Harbour, and the native people still depended on naphtha pressure lamps for light and dry cell batteries for the operation of small appliances.

In summer, meat is still stored in large ice cellars, which can be dug readily as the overburden is deep, silty and relatively free of stones, and ground ice occurs chiefly in the form of wedges. There are eight native-owned cellars with a total storage space of about 1500 cubic feet. These are usually shared by two neighbours, although there is one large community cellar east of the settlement.

Air, sea and radio links have been developed with the mainland. A supply vessel visits the settlement at least once annually, and there is a weekly or biweekly aircraft from Inuvik. There is a post office at the weather station, and in the village itself a commercial radio-telephone link with Inuvik provides both telegraph and telephone access to mainland Canada.

### **Outside agencies**

In 1967, there were three non-native agencies operating in the community: a Department of Transport meteorological station, a Royal Canadian Mounted Police detachment and a Roman Catholic mission. These brought about ten outsiders to the community as transient residents, all single males.

Seven men were at the meteorological station, which also acts as an air-radio communications link for the region and maintains the village air strip. Because the station is some distance from the settlement and because its functions serve primarily a national rather than local interest, its impact on the community has been limited. It has added to community life in providing a place for movies and occasionally parties, as well as improving air service from the mainland, but the station's personnel have little or no involvement in day-to-day community life, either in terms of their job functions or their spare-time activity.

Prior to 1968, the two RCMP constables had numerous duties beyond policing the island (for indeed crime and misdemeanour are extremely rare), and these pertained chiefly to the health and welfare of the community, since there was neither doctor, nurse nor administrator present.

Although most Sachs Harbour people are Anglicans, the only mission there was established by the Oblate Order in 1962. In 1965 a large building was erected to house the church, the mission residence and a meeting and recreation hall. The missionary, a long-time resident of the North, spends several months of the year away from the settlement and during such time the mission is closed down.

On the whole, relations between whites and Eskimos have been good. In many ways, the Eskimos have become quite dependent on the existence of the white community at Sachs Harbour, not only for their official duties but also as they provide facilities for recreation and entertainment. This dependence is mainly on the jobs and institutions rather than upon the individual members of the white community. Most whites are there for only a year or two, and in the eyes of the Eskimos they may come or go, be liked or disliked, but the job they fill will remain, and its functions will continue regardless. No white person has ever spent more than five years at Sachs, and in this respect the community is unlike most others in the North, where through long residence a missionary or trader may have gained considerable personal power and authority in local affairs.

Although by 1967 Sachs Harbour was no longer merely an outlying and temporary camp, the tenor of community life was very different from almost any other settlement in the North. This was not simply due to its economic well-being which has already been documented. Equally significant was the virtual absence of outsiders in the community. Certainly, the Bankslanders were inextricably linked with the outside world, but the loci of interaction were Inuvik and Edmonton rather than in the community itself, and the media of interaction were telegrams, mail, and occasional visits to or from the mainland for specific purposes rather than continuous, face to face, and all-encompassing personal contact.

Most other northern settlements already had a small but influential white community consisting of teachers, nurses, administrators, police, traders, missionaries and transient labourers. Sachs Harbour had few of these outside agents of metropolitan social and economic change and control. Also significant was the absence of white women and children, whose presence in other areas tended to increase the solidarity of the white community for the purpose of "setting a good example" to the natives, as well as increasing its social distance from the native community in order that such directed social change would remain "uncontaminated" by any undesirable reverse flow.

In short, Sachs Harbour was simply not the plural, outsider-dominated community so typical of the North, as described by Kew (1962), Vallee (1962), and, more recently, Smith (1971). Both the physical appearance of the village and its pattern of life were the creation of its native inhabitants. No outside agency had yet planned the settlement on a grand design, and no local functionary yet told the villagers how to live or what their opportunities would be. For the outsider, there was no sheltered refuge from the reality of Banks Island life in comfortable Crown housing estates. To live there was to do so on the terms and in the style of the Bankslanders themselves.

## Population

The Eskimo population of Sachs Harbour on 1 January 1967 was 73, divided into 16 nuclear families plus 5 single men. Twelve of these families and three single men depended entirely upon trapping for their income. Table 1.1 indicates the origins and length of residence on the island of these full-time trappers (the background and significance of these data have been discussed in Volume One, Chapter Three.)

The remaining family heads or individuals in the settlement, part-time trappers whose income was largely derived from other sources, were as follows: two men, formerly excellent trappers, were then full-time employees of the Department of Transport and the RCMP respectively. There were two widowed family heads originally from Victoria Island, one older boy living at home temporarily and a man from the Central Arctic paroled to Sachs Harbour. In addition, 28 children from 11 families were attending boarding school in Inuvik or elsewhere. These children were home only during July and August. The total resident population was thus 101 persons. Seven older children of Sachs Harbour parents are permanently living elsewhere, and are classed as non-resident.

Any analysis of the structure, schedules and trends of this population must be approached with caution. In the first place this is a very small group, for which the calculation of the customary statistics and parameters would be pretentious if not misleading. The composition of the group is continually affected by migration, non-resident family members, adoptions, and the temporary presence of married men who have left their families on the mainland, so that it is not a "breeding population" in a strict demographic sense. The people of Banksland are members of two larger groups: the W3 (Delta and Tuktoyaktuk Eskimo) and W2 (Western Copper Eskimo) registration group,<sup>1</sup> each of which approximate breeding populations. The Bankslanders may reasonably be seen as a selected sample of these larger groups, with similar demographic attributes. Very broadly speaking, these groups exhibit above average birth, death, and infant mortality rates. The birth rate has probably always been high, whereas the death and particularly the infant mortality rates, which were formerly high, have been declining rapidly for at least a decade in the western region and more recently in the Coppermine area. Extremely high fertility rates are characteristic of the internal structures of these groups, and the median age is frequently under 15. This is apparently not a recent development, as such rates have prevailed for over a decade and possibly for three or four decades.

The demography of Sachs Harbour is essentially a reflection of this general situation. During the years 1964-66 there were 15 births and one death. Fertility ratios have been in the order of 1000/1000 since 1955, as well as for 1941, the only other year for which data are available. It must be emphasized again that this is not a "breeding population" and such figures must not be taken at face value. Yet no amount of adjustment could negate the indication of unusually high fertility ratios and natural increase rates.

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<sup>1</sup>The Canadian Arctic has been divided into several health and registration districts, in each of which all Eskimos have been given registration numbers for administrative convenience. Health and demographic statistics are maintained by district.

**TABLE 1.1**

Ethnic origin, birthplace and place of origin of full-time trappers residing at Sachs Harbour, 1966-67

a. Ethnic origin

Alaskan Eskimo	6
Mackenzie Eskimo	1
Mixed Blood <sup>a</sup>	4
Copper Eskimo	4
Total	15

<sup>a</sup>Chiefly those descended from a union of an American whaler with a Mackenzie or immigrant Alaskan Eskimo woman.

b. Region of birth

Mackenzie Delta	6
Herschel—Tuktoyaktuk	0
Baillie Island district	3
Victoria Island	4
Banks Island	2
Total	15

c. Area of residence prior to emigration to Banks Island

Area	Number of trappers	Total years of residence on Banks Island	Average length of residence on Banks Island (years)
Mackenzie Delta	6	59	9.8
Herschel—Tuktoyaktuk	1	7	7.0
Baillie Island district	2	38	19.0
Victoria Island	3	33	11.0
Banks Island <sup>b</sup>	3	24	8.0
Total	15	161	10.7

<sup>b</sup>Refers to individuals raised on Banks Island before becoming independent adult trappers.

d. Period of emigration to Banks Island

1928-36	1
1937-41	2
1942-48	2
1951-55	1
1955-61	6
1961-67	3
Total	15

Source: Field investigations

Figure 1.2 indicates the age-sex structure of the population. Certain age groups stand out, especially among males. Five men are in the age 50-64 bracket; their wives are on the whole much younger. It is the children of these older family heads who account for most of the bulge in the age 15-24 group. Another five men are in their early thirties and their wives are generally of similar age. Outstanding, of course, is the large number of children under the age of 10: 45 of the 101 residents. Virtually all couples, whether in their early twenties or late fifties, have progeny in this age group.

It cannot be concluded however, that a "population explosion" is imminent. In fact, the population of Sachs Harbour has remained fairly constant in the last few years at about 100 people (including school children), as has the number of trappers at just under 20. These numbers appear to be close to the desirable level in terms of exploiting the island's resources, and should not be exceeded significantly.<sup>1</sup> Despite the large number of children, there is reason to suppose that the number of trappers on Banks Island 20 years hence will not have increased, and indeed may have declined. There are several mechanisms regulating the number of adults in the community, and particularly the number of trappers.

Although there is a very high rate of natural increase, the proportion of teenage boys going into trapping has for years been small, and with increased schooling and the changing social and economic pressures in the region as a whole, should become even smaller. The reasons for this will be elaborated in a subsequent section.

Immigration has been almost non-existent since the early 1960s. At that time, with reports of good fur harvests and high prices reaching the mainland at a time when DEWline construction employment was coming to an end, some Sachs Harbour trappers feared a flood of immigration and the consequent overharvesting and ruination of the island's resources. This culminated with the formation of the Banks Island Trappers' Association in 1963, and the proclamation of the island as a group-registered trapping area in which the association had exclusive rights, in accordance with the provisions of the Territorial Game Ordinance. No person may trap in this area without the express consent of the majority of the association's members. Any member who fails to exercise his trapping rights in the area for more than one year must apply to the association for readmission.

During the first four years after the association was formed, there were only three formal applications for membership from outside the community. Two people were turned down; one was admitted but decided not to come. Even the mere existence of the association and its formal procedures has discouraged other potential applicants altogether. Opinion in the community is not unanimous about this restrictive approach to the island's resources. Some feel keenly that they must protect and conserve them so that their children may also enjoy a bountiful life from trapping and hunting. Others feel that the abundance should be shared, and that it is wrong to shut out their kin-folk from the mainland. So far the majority has held the former point of view.

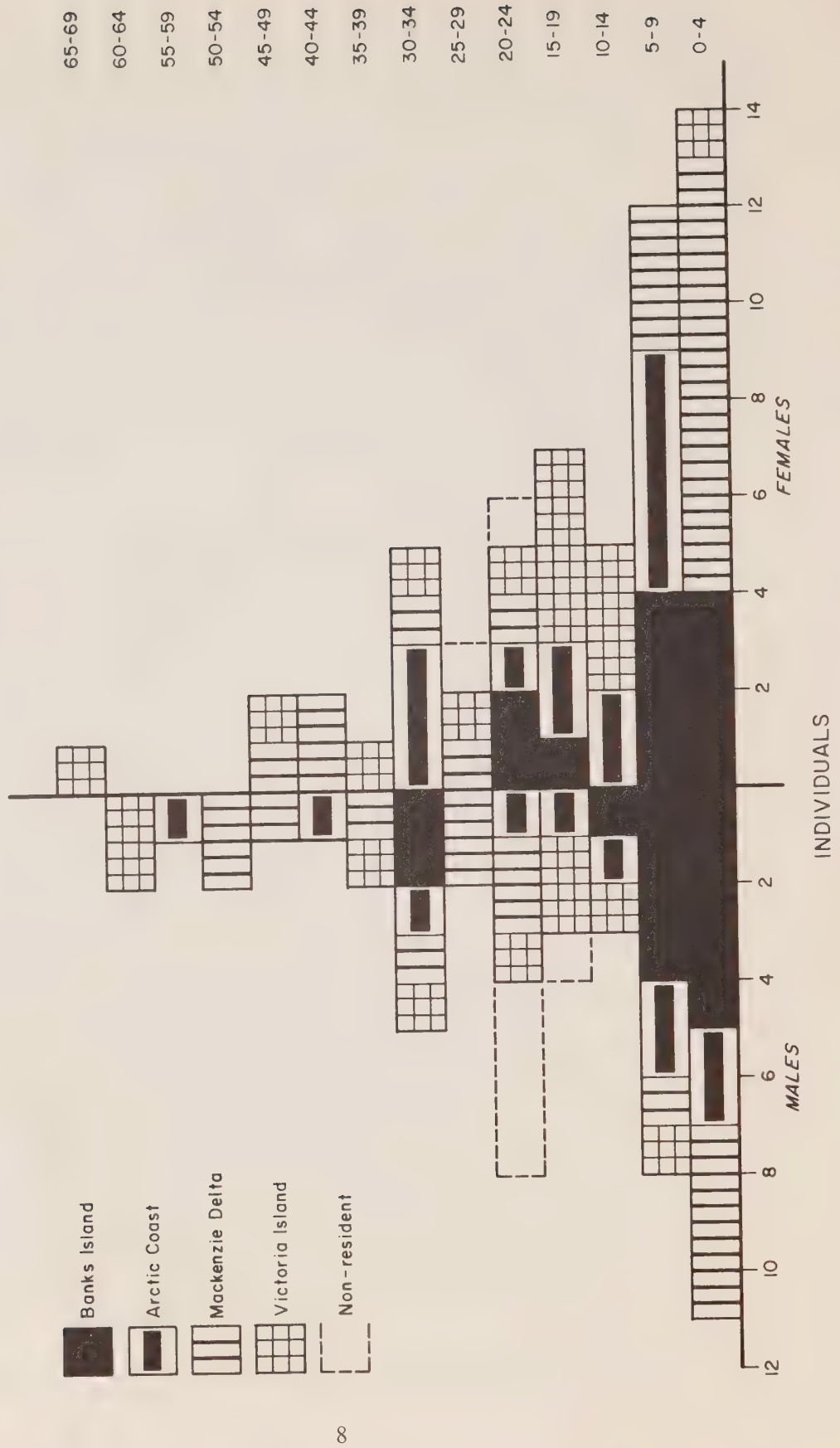
The establishment of the registered trapping area was doubtless of immediate benefit to the islanders in staving off the threat of overpopulation. It also allows the islanders to maintain the character and integrity of their community as they desire.

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<sup>1</sup>The evidence for this statement has been presented and discussed in the previous two volumes as well as in the concluding chapter of this volume.

Figure 1.2

POPULATION STRUCTURE BY AGE, SEX AND BIRTHPLACE  
SACHS HARBOUR, 1 JANUARY 1967



For example, many people feel that they want to build a community of a permanent and harmonious nature, and they would not like to see a large number of young single trappers come over in the good winters and "mine" the country. Yet if there is a threat of underpopulation instead of overpopulation, as may indeed be the case a few years hence, the Bankslanders will have to change their present restrictive approach, and try to encourage new blood to enter the community.

Marriage is also a problem in maintaining the current population level. Due to the limited choice in such a small population, mates are often sought from other settlements. Generally a young man will marry a girl from Tuktoyaktuk or Holman and return to Sachs Harbour with her, whereas girls often marry into families from these other settlements and move away from Sachs. So far this has had a balancing effect. But life at Sachs Harbour is a hard one for a woman. Even some of the older trappers acknowledge that their wives had difficulty in adjusting to the rigorous and isolated life. With the great changes in social attitudes on the mainland, there are few girls today who would willingly marry a Sachs Harbour trapper, no matter how successful he was. The Banksland girls, schooled in Inuvik, are more anxious than ever to marry outside the community. Ervin has noted a tendency among Delta girls to reject native boys as mates altogether (1968:10-11).

Finally, there will be a tendency for the population as a whole to age. There are very few old people in the settlement now, but in ten years' time several of the present trappers will no longer be active. In the past, when Banks Island was only a wintering place, people simply stayed back on the mainland when they became too old to trap. Now Sachs Harbour is home to these people, and it is by no means certain that they will return to the mainland. It seems likely, therefore, that as older trappers retire, the proportion of fully productive families will decrease. This will certainly result in an increase in transfer payments into the community, as very few families, despite their present well-being, have any reserve in savings, and most could not support themselves for any length of time without trapping.

## **Education**

The level of educational achievement at Sachs Harbour is higher than in other Western Arctic communities, both at the adult and school age levels. As of 1967, about half of the adult population (17 and over) had been to school. Of those who passed school leaving age a decade or more ago, before the Inuvik boarding school came into operation, none went beyond grade six. One-third of the men and half of the women of this older group attended school (usually one of the mission schools at Aklavik, Shingle Point or Hay River), but reached only grade three or four. If one does not count those of Copper Eskimo origin, disparity of schooling between men and women is even greater. This was typical of the Western Arctic in the earlier days when the young girls were the ones sent to school. Among the people of that generation, it is the wife who is literate and must handle correspondence and routine business affairs. The majority of Sachs Harbour men cannot read or write in either English or Eskimo.

Some of the younger trappers who were schooled in Inuvik have reached higher grades and indeed have attended (though not completed) high school. In general, however, these men are far less committed to trapping than those over 30, and tend to shift between trapping on Banks Island and working for wages on the mainland.

Many Sachs Harbour parents feel their own education is inadequate, and wish their children to receive a better one. They believe that education offers their children a greater choice in life, and will be of benefit to them even if they choose to remain on Banks Island as trappers. Hence, among the younger children, school attendance has been extremely high and achievement and perseverance are good. As there was no school in the settlement, these youngsters attended boarding school in Inuvik. Several Bankslanders in their early twenties have done very well in school, and have attended university or obtained steady jobs elsewhere. These people are no longer integral to the community and will almost certainly never return on a permanent basis.

### **Implications of education for the future**

It was previously suggested that despite a high rate of population increase at Sachs, recruitment into the trapping profession may decline in future. Many observers have commented on the incompatibility of modern education, especially in regional boarding schools, with the maintenance of the old land-based way of life. Obviously children who attend school full-time, away from home, have no chance to learn the requisite skills of travelling, camping, and trapping on the tundra. Just as significant, however, is the decline in the prestige of trapping in the Western Arctic region.

On the mainland, trappers have been aware for a decade that their skills and hard work have brought them neither an adequate standard of living nor positions of prestige or power in the increasingly outsider-dominated community. Their children, who compare their fathers with other role models in the community such as pilots, doctors and administrators, are keenly aware of this. A study of aspirations among school children in grades seven to twelve in the Mackenzie Delta by D. G. Smith (1971), has shown that most youngsters place trapping very low in their evaluation of occupations. This study, conducted in 1967, showed that native children (mainly in their teens) ranked trapping fortieth out of forty-eight occupational types; similar low status being accorded to other land-based (and native-identified) activities such as reindeer herding, and to menial town labouring jobs. A similar ranking of places where they would like to live, placed "on the land" at the bottom of the scale, and proceeded upwards through the small settlements to the larger centres of the Mackenzie District, with the most desired locations being the major cities of western Canada. This study found no significant differences in the occupational or locational aspirations of white and native children.

Sachs Harbour boys, like most other young boys, want to grow up to be like their fathers. Yet these children, as they continue their schooling in Inuvik, can hardly fail to be influenced by the prevailing attitudes of their peers. In any case the tensions felt by so many northern children between the large modern centres where they have been schooled and the small old fashioned villages whence they originate, between southern Canadian aspirations and northern Canadian opportunities, and between their own world of experience and that of their parents, certainly affect Banksland children as well.

The establishment of a school in Sachs Harbour<sup>1</sup> will certainly mitigate the shock of separation from parents and of coping with a new and different environment at such an

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<sup>1</sup>A definite commitment to do so was made by the federal government in early 1967. *See* Chapter Two.

early age, and the children will be much more a part of their community. Yet they will be encouraged to go beyond grade six, which will necessitate going to the mainland, and even those few who may choose to stay in the settlement and learn to trap will also visit the mainland on occasion. No child will be able to remain aloof from the influences of the world outside Banks Island, or from the alternative modes of life open to him. Each child will have to choose at an early age, even before he can be aware of the implications, what kind of life he intends to lead and thus where he should live and what he should do in order to achieve this end.

A local day school is doubtless more compatible with a future in trapping than the boarding-school system. Minor modifications of the school year which allow young boys to get out on the trail with their fathers will also help. But these things are certain to be of much less significance than the nature and extent of the social and economic changes occurring in neighbouring communities, especially in Inuvik. Whatever regard the parents hold for their community and their way of life; whatever amount of money trapping can be shown to bring in dollars and cents; whatever privation and misery may exist on the mainland, there seems little doubt that most of the young people will aspire to a southern Canadian way of life, perhaps even in southern Canada. The impact of outside technology, outside attitudes and outside culture has been profound. Very few boys will voluntarily take up trapping on Banksland, especially as a life long commitment, and those who do will have difficulty in finding wives to accompany them in such a venture.

### **Sociological attributes of the community**

Sachs Harbour is widely recognized as a distinctive community, both by other native people in the Western Arctic and by whites who have visited it. The economic well being, and its basis in fur trapping, obviously stand out. Yet the Bankslanders are socially distinctive as well. The historical basis for this has already been discussed in Volume One.

Because of the heterogeneous origins and prior experiences of the Bankslanders, the identification of core values in the community must be tentative. Yet by any measure, egalitarianism and independence rank very high. The basic unit of production, consumption and economic decision-making is the nuclear family, the last function particularly lying with the head of the family. Almost all of the means of production, as well as the produce itself, are considered individual or family property. The idea of communal ownership of property between two or more families (except for father and son) is alien; for example none would jointly purchase a boat or a snowmobile.

Sachs Harbour men are highly individualistic and most have a strong sense of personal initiative. This does not preclude mutual aid; but such aid is not exchanged along clearly defined and inflexible networks such as kin, band or clan. Selective reciprocity is the rule, on the basis of freely cultivated relationships within the community.<sup>1</sup> Such relationships are often, but not always, based on blood-ties.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For amplification of the nature of these relationships, *see*, for example, Munch (1970). There are some clear parallels between the mutual aid patterns described by him on the island of Tristan da Cunha, and those at Sachs Harbour.

<sup>2</sup>There are, nevertheless, specially felt obligations amongst kin. For the Bankslanders, these are of greater significance in their ties with people from other communities, particularly from their place of origin. For example, within the village, exchange networks are not necessarily based on blood lines, whereas with other communities they are almost exclusively so based.

Few tasks in the community in fact require mutual aid. House building is perhaps the most obvious one. The sharing of food may also be seen as a form of mutual aid. If distributed in its raw form, it is done so selectively, although food on the table is unquestioningly shared with visitors regardless of whom they may be. Joint hunting ventures are common, especially for seal or caribou, and certain tasks as well as the proceeds of the hunt are often shared. There are also trapping partnerships, usually based on kinship, but these constitute only an agreement to travel together. Neither the work nor the proceeds of the venture are shared, as each man sets his own traps and retrieves his own foxes. Partnerships are by no means permanent and may last only a few seasons. Some men do not engage in partnerships, preferring to travel independently.

The tendency to share traditional things such as seal and caribou meat, and not to share more modern things such as fox pelts, capital equipment and money, is indicative of the slow transformation of values which has occurred under the exigencies of the trapping economy. Trapping is inherently a much more individualistic venture than the hunting activities of aboriginal times, and it is not surprising that the Bankslanders, for so long highly oriented to trapping, should exhibit relatively strong tendencies toward individualism.

A high value is placed on individual autonomy. Persons are esteemed for their initiative and success in economic and social activities, but only so long as these do not infringe on the actual or potential well-being and autonomy of others. Foster's model of the "image of limited good" as an economic manifestation of the cognitive orientation or basic world view of peasant peoples, is congruent with some of the attitudes of the Bankslanders (and of neighbouring communities as well), particularly with regard to resources: "'good things' exist in fixed and limited quantities . . . and . . . *there is no way directly within peasant power to increase the available quantities . . . it follows that an individual or family can improve a position only at the expense of others.*" (Foster, 1965:296-97). This view is evident in such statements as "leave some foxes for the rest" to a man departing for the trapline, or "that guy is always trying to get ahead" said disparagingly of another person.

Such considerations apply not only to the appropriation of resources but also of power. One ought not to impose authority on others or meddle in the affairs of others. Actions contravening the code of equality and independence engender mutual suspicions and latent hostilities. Social control is essentially limited to public opinion, often subtly expressed. Although this method is usually sufficient, the lack of other, stronger ones means that the community has tended to turn to outside agencies or individuals for the resolution of internal conflicts, expecting them to exercise the authority and sanctions that the villagers themselves are unwilling to use on one another. Mutual aid and obligations are ties that bind when freely given, but they cannot be imposed.

In a small, isolated community, personal relationships are of great significance and visiting is a fundamental social activity. Hence there is a profound closeness among the people which would not ordinarily be observed in a larger community. Though the sharing of material goods has declined, psychological interdependence, especially among kin, remains deep rooted. The avoidance of overt conflict is a very strong trait among the Bankslanders, although as a corollary of this, there is also a tendency to speak ill of others in their absence. Balikci (1968) has described a similar although more extreme situation among the Kutchin.

Thus, despite a sense of common identity, shared values and deep interpersonal bonds, the community is anarchistic and atomistic.<sup>1</sup> This is accentuated by divisions within the community based on the differing origins of its population. The main division is between the “Western People” from the mainland, and the Copper Eskimos from Victoria Island. The latter were latecomers to Banksland, and because of their differing history of contact and acculturation are somewhat less oriented to trapping, and tend to be less aggressive and individualistic than the Westerners. There is a tendency for the Westerners to look down on the Copper Eskimos: “Kogmoliks” is the pejorative term applied to these people, who are considered to be more primitive (indeed more “Eskimo”), less sophisticated and less clean. The distinction is somewhat apparent in housing, as the Copper Eskimos all live in one part of the village (albeit by their own choice), but the division is not really a deep one. There is no lack of social intercourse between the two groups, as they form trapping partnerships and even intermarry across “ethnic” lines. Both groups are predominantly Anglican and there is no religious division in the community. Yet there is some mistrust and suspicion, and the older Westerners, from whom the strongest impulse for immigration control has come, do feel that the Copper Eskimos should remain a minority element in the community.

Within the larger Western Eskimo group, there is also a division. On the one hand are the older men of coastal origin who have lived and trapped together for years and were members of the early pioneering group. There is an extremely strong sense of solidarity and mutual obligation among these men, and although there may be strong disagreement between individuals over certain issues, they will not act against one another. On the other hand is a group of more recent immigrants, mainly younger men from the Delta who are not as strongly obligated either through kinship or friendship to the early settlers, and who will more willingly oppose them or initiate action where thought necessary.

We have shown elsewhere that the Bankslanders are recognized by others as a distinctive social group, and have also outlined some of the features that make them so. It should also be noted that despite centrifugal tendencies within the community, the Bankslanders themselves also have a strong sense of group identity. This is manifested both in group solidarity in the face of external pressures (or in extracting benefits from external sources) as well as in a growing sense of community, especially with the development of a permanent village with a stable population during the last decade.

Group solidarity has made it possible for individual members of the community to represent it or speak on its behalf to the outside world. The Bankslanders tend to elect or acknowledge such persons not only on the basis of their ability to speak and act for the community, but also on the recognition that their own freedom of action will not likely be diminished. Leaders at Sachs Harbour thus emerge primarily as “talking chiefs”. By personal initiative and force of example they may effect change, but certainly have no coercive authority over other members of the community.

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<sup>1</sup>For a more expanded discussion of this tension between atomism and dependency as it exists in the Mackenzie Delta, see Smith (1971), especially pp. 148-200. Because so many of the Bankslanders are originally from the mainland, they share the values of the Delta people to a significant degree, although the milieu in which these values are manifested in behaviour is of course rather different. Certainly Smith's observation that “values of personal autonomy and individualism prevail, but are countered by sentiments of dependency and sensitivity to others,” and his summarization of the values of self-reliance, self-determination and self-sufficiency (p. 151) holds true for Sachs Harbour as well.

The emergent sense of community has tended to diminish the importance of geographic origin, although as mentioned above this is still strong. It has also probably weakened the ties which most individuals have with relatives in Tuktoyaktuk, the Delta, or Holman, although these, too, are still important. Sachs Harbour is after all a unique community in that all its adult members reside there by choice, not birth.

Two important signs of community action were the formation of the Trappers' Association in 1963 to control access to fur and game rights on the island, as already discussed, and the establishment of a community association in 1965, with the encouragement of the regional administration. Because there are so few whites at Sachs Harbour, the community association has probably been an instrument of the native people themselves to a greater degree than in many other settlements. This association has raised and spent money on community projects and was able to exert sufficient pressure on government authorities to obtain a day school in the village.

Increasingly, the Bankslanders realize that their community and their way of life is threatened as never before by outside forces. The need for collective action is increasingly perceived by all, yet because the prerequisite social forms are largely absent, its fulfillment has been slow and difficult. Knowledge of the nature and mechanics of these outside forces is very limited; the public meeting as a forum of discussion and debate is alien; overt conflict is devalued, and leadership is suspect. The necessity of meeting and organizing to protect their interests is lamented, particularly by older people, since such activities are considered just as antithetical to the traditional ways as the external threats they are designed to stave off. In their words, "In the old days we never had to have meetings, people minded their own business and we were happy." The Bankslanders are truly on the horns of a dilemma, and how they will resolve this conflict is by no means clear.

### **The culmination of a way of life**

The Bankslanders are a true pioneer people. They have a tradition of innovation combined with a fidelity to the "old ways" (which to them mean not the aboriginal ways of an unremembered past, but the traditional fur-trade way of life which lasted on the mainland well into the 1950s). Certainly until 1967, this combination had enabled them to maintain a way of life they valued strongly, and to create a community they felt most suitable for raising their children. They knew that on Banksland they could retain the measure of personal autonomy they so valued. There they could obtain many of the benefits the outside world had to offer, without having that world, and particularly its representatives, perpetually in their midst.

To most men, the trapping life is a free life. Wage work on the mainland is not seen as an alternative, because few have the skills to be other than labourers, and the regimentation is detested. Some older men at Sachs have assumed wage positions in the settlement recently as these have become available; they value the security of a steady income but feel their life is not what it used to be. Yet at least they can still trap and hunt near the settlement, and frequently do so in their spare time.

The trappers have each made a conscious commitment. Capable men, proud of themselves and their way of life, they came to pursue the trade they knew best, knowing that on Banks Island they could realize success. They did not come to hang around the settlement nor to collect relief. They know full well the conditions of life they left behind on the mainland, and it has been their fervent wish that such a fate should not befall themselves and their community. Although they visit Tuktoyaktuk and the Delta frequently and have relatives there, they perceive those communities to be without economic opportunity, without adequate supplies of country food, no longer in control of their own destiny, and characterized by drunkenness, delinquency, brutality, poverty and aimlessness.

While realizing that living at Sachs Harbour is not without its disadvantages, the Bankslanders feel in sum that they have been able to live "the good life" there, and that there has been continuing opportunity for improving it. What they have built is their own. The federal government has rarely offered positive encouragement to commercial trapping, and in recent years its actions have served to discourage it. Federal investment in health, housing, utilities and education has, until recently, been virtually absent at Sachs Harbour, although other Arctic settlements have received their full share.

There is no question of the present generation of trappers abandoning this life, although they will be quick to adopt new ways which promise to make life easier, more secure and more enjoyable. They will be able to accommodate changing wants and new ways to their basic living pattern. Movies, mail, airplanes and trips to Inuvik are all becoming more important, and they can constitute distractions from trapping itself. Twenty years ago when the events of one winter's day were those of the next as well, there was nothing special to stay home for from the trail. Today, movie night or the arrival of an airplane are reasons to delay departure, even at the risk of being held up subsequently by bad weather. The presence of a day school and thus of the children all year round will increase the already strong orientation to home and family, and the introduction of electricity and further household improvements will continue to increase the contrast in comfort and ease between home and trail. These things will doubtless make many men less willing to spend long periods away from home. Life in the scattered winter camps is over; settlement living is now sufficiently attractive that only the rare individual would give it up for more productive but isolated and distant trapping grounds. With technological improvements such as snowmobiles, however, these ameliorations can be accommodated without detriment to trapping success.

Younger people are either unaware of this opportunity for good incomes, independence, steady family lives, and (for men at least) psychological gratification, or are unimpressed by it. In either case very few are opting for this way of life, even among the Banksland children. There are some who have, but it remains to be seen how strong their commitment to it will be, and how easily they may choose other opportunities. The recruitment of new trappers may well become a problem.

Yet for the present group of trappers, many of whom are younger men, the Banksland way of life appeared, at least as of the late 1960s, to offer a stable, long-term future. These men have many productive years of trapping ahead of them. They have already made their choice and their commitment to trapping on Banks Island. They expect that life to sustain them economically, socially and psychologically for the remainder of their working lives, and perhaps into their retirement as well.



## CHAPTER TWO

### THE ENCROACHMENT OF GOVERNMENT

In the previous chapter we documented the nature of the Sachs Harbour community as it was in the mid 1960s, and identified some of the problems which it seemed to face at that time. Since then, significant changes have occurred, having profound implications for the lives of the Bankslanders. These have often been entrained by forces unleashed from afar, over which the islanders have little or no control.

The most dramatic event, and the one which has received the widest attention, was the arrival of oil exploration crews in the summer of 1970. While this was indeed of great significance, as will be discussed in the third chapter of this report, it was part of a larger process. Since 1967, there has also been a large-scale extension of government services and administration to the village of Sachs Harbour itself. This extension has brought many benefits which the Bankslanders themselves desired and requested. Yet it has also brought unforeseen and unsought consequences.

Sachs Harbour has been increasingly drawn into the orbit of the larger Canadian society; willy-nilly the villagers have been subjected to a growing degree of control by the national polity and economy necessitating greater conformity to external norms. This more general train of events is the subject of this chapter. Their significance lies not only in that they provide a background for understanding the oil controversy of 1970, but also in that they exemplify a general process occurring all across the north: the subordination of the hinterland to the metropolis.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Metropolis and hinterland : a general consideration**

The relations between metropolis and hinterland have been widely discussed by economists, historians and geographers. Whether treating these relationships on an international scale, as between imperial power and colony, or at a lower level, as between city and region, most research has been devoted to an explication of flows of capital, resources and labour between metropolis and hinterland, and the benefits resulting to each therefrom. Indeed the relationship is seen generally as reciprocal or symbiotic, in which the division of functions between the two is necessary and beneficial to their respective development.

For Canadians, the relations between metropolis and hinterland are of particular interest. Harold Innis' staple theory, and the Laurentian thesis expounded by Lower and Creighton, for example, have profoundly influenced the literature on Canadian economic development. The growth of regional metropolitan centres, and the competition between them for control of hinterland areas, have been examined by such writers as Zaslow (1948) and Burghardt (1971), and the degree of metropolitan dominance in Canada has been clearly demonstrated by Kerr (1968).

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<sup>1</sup>Another significant, though unrelated, change at Sachs Harbour has been the near complete transition from dogs to snowmobiles for winter transport. This has already been discussed elsewhere (Usher, 1970b).

Rather less attention has been given to the impact of this dominance on the hinterland itself, and particularly to the question of whether the relationship is indeed a symbiotic one between equals or a parasitic one more characteristic of imperialism. This is perhaps surprising in a country such as Canada. Regional disparity is a persistent national problem, and despite government attempts to alleviate it, there has been no significant convergence of regional per capita income during the past half-century (Economic Council of Canada, 1965:102-3).

That many areas of Canada, particularly rural or isolated regions, face serious problems of economic and social decline is not in doubt. Most analyses of regional problems have tended to emphasize inherent deficiencies in one or more factors of production. Rea (1968), for example, uses a conventional staple model, emphasizing internal features, in examining problems of economic development in the Canadian North. The adequacy of this approach has been questioned in a review of his book by Aglamek (1970).

Seldom has there been any attempt to see if there is a national or international structural basis for these problems. Exceptions are the works of Watkins (1963) and Levitt (1970), although they are primarily devoted to the problem on an international scale, viewing the whole of Canada as a hinterland of world metropolitan powers. Of more direct interest is a recent article by Archibald (1971), in which he examines the basis of "structural underdevelopment" in the Maritime provinces based on Frank's (1967) model of underdevelopment in Latin America. These studies, however, are concerned almost exclusively with the economic relationships between metropolis and hinterland.

There are also important sociological dimensions of the metropolis-hinterland relationship. Numerous Canadian studies have shed light on these, although rarely within the explicit framework of metropolis-hinterland theory. Noteworthy are a number of the studies sponsored by the Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland (*see* Brox, 1969; Dewitt, 1969; Freeman, 1969; Iverson and Matthews, 1968; Skolnik, 1968; and Wadel, 1969), on the outport resettlement programme in Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as several studies of small native communities in the Canadian North. Dunning (1959), Kew (1962) and Vallee (1962), for example, have noted the importance of Euro-Canadian or "outsider" dominance and its effect on local value systems, social structure and community affairs. Smith (1971) has employed a plural model of analysis in the Mackenzie Delta, and Paine and others have developed theories of patron, broker and client relationships in similar local settings (Paine, 1971). In general, such studies have concentrated on the sociological phenomena at the hinterland interface, although the two last-named authors have attempted to explore the structural aspects of the relationship between small traditional communities and the major national institutions affecting them.

The present analysis, while concentrating on the community of Sachs Harbour itself, also seeks to explore the nature of its social, political and bureaucratic relationships with metropolitan Canada, just as its economic relationship was examined in Volume One, Chapter One. This is done in the context of metropolis-hinterland theory because it demonstrates the wider significance of the Banksland experience as an example of a general process.

The distinction between metropolis and hinterland is one of power as well as of place. Such significant social and economic functions as the manufacture of goods, the provision of services, technical innovation, bureaucratic administration and political control are not evenly distributed over the face of the earth. In all modern societies, these tend to become concentrated in a few large metropolitan centres. These metropoli become centres of national institutional life as well as centres of innovation in all fields. The economic and political power of metropolitan institutions affect the hinterland, and innovations are diffused to the hinterland. The emanation of power and the diffusion of innovations are channelled through “entrepôts” or intermediate metropoli. These intermediate metropoli are subordinate to the major metropoli yet also exert control over their own hinterlands.

An inevitable aspect of metropolitan dominance is that agents of the senior metropolis are located in the various subordinate metropoli. Such agents are identified not by their geographic origin, for in many cases these agents are native to the junior metropolis or its tributary region. Rather they are identified by their role and their employer, whose values they come to accept and in whose interests they act. This hierarchical relationship will be familiar to students of central-place theory. A more rigorous elaboration of the theory of metropolis-hinterland relations requires a method of identifying levels within the hierarchy, and the role of each in this relationship.

Metropolis and hinterland are not monolithic entities. Each has its own social and economic structure, and quite obviously not all inhabitants of the metropolis are equally party to specific interactions with the hinterland. Yet there are special problems raised by the metropolis-hinterland dichotomy that are not adequately explained by other socio-economic divisions such as class.

Numerous developments in Canada suggest that, at least in the context of current Canadian political and economic organization, the relationship between metropolis and hinterland is not one of reciprocity between equals. The tendency toward metropolitan dominance has accelerated, especially during the post-war years, and we are coming to accept unquestioningly predictions that by the end of the century, the great majority of Canadians will live in and around Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. What is less appreciated is the increasing limitation on the autonomy and opportunity of those who do not reside in these centres. The growth of metropolitan Canada is largely dependent on the extraction of resources and labour (and, some would argue, surplus capital) from the hinterland. Consciously or not, metropolitan Canada is now in a position to dictate the terms on which the hinterland population will live.

Numerous programmes have been devised in recent years to “rationalize” rural economies, generally involving the depopulation of the regions in which they are based. The profitability of economic activity in the hinterland is established by the metropolis, which almost alone has the power to make significant decisions with regard to pricing, marketing, capital investment and manpower policies. The injection of labour and capital into the hinterland is determined primarily by the rate of return on such investment to metropolitan institutions, rather than the net benefit in economic, let alone social terms to the hinterland itself. Thus, where the hinterland population is engaged in activities profitable to the metropolis, it is encouraged or at least permitted to continue

doing so. Where this is not the case, as in many parts of the Maritimes, the Prairies and the North, rationalization, reorganization and depopulation are brought about, usually on terms established by the metropolis yet having profound social as well as economic consequences for the hinterland.

Economic dualism is one such consequence. This phenomenon has been described in Newfoundland by Brox (1969) and is clearly evident in the Canadian North as well. Two economies exist side by side. One is characterized by a few, large, single-purpose enterprises which are capital intensive, employ a high level of technology and imported skilled labour, and whose economic and transport links are directly and exclusively with metropolitan Canada. The other economy is characterized by many small scale enterprises, generally at the family level, but which are multi-purpose in the sense that they rely on the exploitation of various resources and opportunities in combination. This system employs local labour, traditional or at least small scale technology, and its links with metropolitan Canada are dependent on intermediary organizations representing metropolitan interests. Particularly significant is that the two economies, despite their geographic proximity, and despite the dependence of each upon the metropolis, are virtually independent of each other. There are few or no linkages in terms of cash or commodity flow, transport, labour mobility or technology. One economy may prosper and grow quite without effect on the other.

Such problems are due in part to the very unequal distribution of economic, political and administrative power between metropolis and hinterland. They are also due to the widening gulf between the values, aspirations and the very conditions of life of the two. The power exercised by metropolis over hinterland in Canada is tempered by humanitarian considerations,<sup>1</sup> but this gulf often distorts or prevents the translation of humanitarian impulses into beneficial and effective programmes at the local level.

The impact of metropolitan values and interests on the hinterland has become increasingly pervasive, undermining the very basis of smaller and more traditional societies or communities. While the resulting homogenization<sup>2</sup> of society as a whole is not totally without benefit to the hinterland, the price paid is seen by many as exorbitant. The degree of control and direction over this process by the hinterland is very limited, and the choice of whether the process should occur at all is simply nonexistent. The commonly accepted proposition that this process is inevitable and beyond individual or collective control, has never been proven. At present it is more in the nature of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Recent developments on Banks Island allow us to examine these questions in detail.

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<sup>1</sup> I.e., current welfare state goals regarding income, medical care, education, housing, and to a limited extent, cultural identity.

<sup>2</sup> By homogenization we refer to the withering away of particularities of place and culture. These are replaced, however, by new differentiations of social and economic structure on a much larger scale. Clearly the metropolis-hinterland relationship implies differentiation in itself. Local social organization is replaced by the national class structure, and values and aspirations change accordingly as the hinterland is drawn into metropolitan market systems. As a result, the problems of any particular hinterland become increasingly analogous to those of other hinterlands, however geographically distant or historically distinctive.

## The hinterland ignored

Banks Island has long lain on the fringe of human activity in the Western Arctic. It was on the outer limits of the *oikoumene* of the Copper Eskimos in the 19th century, and was colonized by Western Eskimos only in the late 1920s. Even the federal government barely maintained effective jurisdiction over the island until the 1950s. Despite the tremendous increase in government services and administrative programmes in the North generally since that time, Banks Island remained largely beyond the orbit of this growth. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (and formerly its predecessor, the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources) was officially responsible for all administrative matters relating to the native population, but routine matters were handled locally by the RCMP detachment. Departmental officers occasionally visited from regional headquarters in Inuvik, in connection with such problems as welfare, adoptions, government loans, game management and handi-craft promotion.<sup>1</sup> Departmental expenditures were limited to aircraft charters for such visiting, and the very small amounts of welfare issued. No capital expenditures were committed prior to 1967.<sup>2</sup>

This state of affairs was due largely to the apparent impermanence of the Banks-land community. So long as camp life persisted, and the people regularly visited the mainland, Sachs Harbour was treated as an outlying camp rather than as a central place like Tuktoyaktuk or Coppermine. In any case the general well-being of the Bankslanders was widely recognized, and the people were regarded as being in little need of government assistance.

## The Banks Island Area Economic Survey

During the course of the department's Area Economic Survey Programme, which covered the entire Arctic during the 1960s, Banks Island was investigated in 1965 (*see* Usher, 1966). This was the first general economic and social investigation of the community. Unlike many of the other area surveys, it did not recommend major new resource harvesting projects, on the grounds that the Banksland economy was basically viable and productive.<sup>3</sup> Suggestions were however made for improving the marketing systems for its produce. The chief finding was that Sachs Harbour had indeed become a permanent community, and hence warranted at least some of the essential services already provided in neighbouring communities, which the Bankslanders themselves desired. The final report called for the construction of a nursing station and a school, and the provision of electricity and a summer water supply system.

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<sup>1</sup>For a more complete account of government actions regarding Banks Island, and particularly the government's role in re-establishing the community in the early 1950s, *see* Volume One, Chapter Three.

<sup>2</sup>With the exception of bulk fuel storage tanks constructed in 1965.

<sup>3</sup>One of the original purposes of the Banksland survey was to investigate the total population/resource balance, in the hope that the island could support additional trappers from overcrowded mainland areas. In fact it was found that the island could not support many more trappers, and in any case the Bankslanders themselves would be opposed to further immigration, especially if it were not arranged through the Trappers Association.

## The Sachs Harbour conference

Following the release of the area survey report in 1966, a meeting of government officials was arranged in Inuvik for November of that year, with representatives from Sachs Harbour invited to discuss the recommendations. This was a new departure, since similar meetings arising out of previous area survey reports had been held in Ottawa and involved only departmental officials.

The Bankslanders, in the meantime, had discussed the merits of the recommendations and set out their own priorities for the agenda. It was their first real opportunity to make the government aware of their needs and problems and to press the government for action.

The community was almost unanimous in its desire for a day school for children up to grade six. The people reckoned that if they placed their emphasis on obtaining a day school, other benefits such as power and water would inevitably follow, and hence the thrust of their petition should be for the school rather than for a number of items all at once. They were interested in discussing the other recommendations of the report, as well as some problems which had arisen more recently, but none of these were as important to them as the school. The Bankslanders' reasons for wanting the school are summarized in their memorandum of December 1966, contained in Appendix A of this volume. It was the hope of obtaining a school above all which persuaded the five delegates from Sachs Harbour to sacrifice their valuable trapping time in late November to come to a conference in Inuvik.

For the Bankslanders, the conference was a mixture of success and frustration. They were grateful for the opportunity of discussing some of their problems with government officials. In a small settlement, with only a few representatives of government present, the myriad regulations and their interpretation often seem arbitrary and illogical to the local people. This is due in part to the rapid turnover of incumbents in government positions, as well as their discretionary powers, which may be used differently by each (*see* Vallee, 1962:105, Smith, 1971:98-99). The Inuvik meeting provided an opportunity to clear the air, at least temporarily, on many of these issues. Though some had been small and personal, they had none the less been a source of irritation in the community.

Yet the conference was also frustrating because the Bankslanders had hoped for immediate answers, which were not and could not have been forthcoming. They had come to see the "big shots" in Inuvik, only to find these were merely a facade, behind which lay more important "big shots" in Fort Smith and Ottawa, and an incomprehensible jungle of programme planning, budgeting, and other complex patterns of bureaucratic decision making. Further, a number of departmental officials from Ottawa, Fort Smith and Inuvik who were supposed to be present at the meeting did not in fact arrive. Finally, the tendency of those officials present to engage in a wide ranging discussion of alternatives, and their questioning of future trends in the settlement, although logical from their point of view, baffled the Sachs Harbour representatives. In the words of one, "We didn't come from Sachs Harbour to argue with you people. All we are interested in is to get help from the Federal Government to set up a school and let them [the children] live the Eskimo life. All we are interested in is whether you are going to okay the school or whether you aren't" (Sachs Harbour Conference, 1966:6).

The depth of feeling on this issue is indicated by the fact that the Bankslanders had even discussed the possibility of setting up a school and hiring a teacher on their own. Because the government's reluctance to put in a school was based largely on the supposed impermanence of the community, it was suggested that portable trailer units be used, which would be cheaper and could be relocated if necessary. The people did not envisage a large or fancy school, they simply wanted sufficient space and personnel to educate their children in the settlement.

Although the Bankslanders did not receive a definite answer on the school, they did at least learn what some of the obstacles were, and gained some inkling of where and how to press their desire for the school, as well as for other concerns they might have.

Following the delegates' return to Sachs Harbour, the Community Association sent detailed memoranda requesting a school to the regional and district officers in the Mackenzie District, to senior officers in the Department of Indian Affairs including the Minister, as well as to the Prime Minister and the Governor General. In eight days the community received a definite assurance that a school would be built.

### **Settlement status**

The Bankslanders had thus achieved their goal: the establishment of a day school in the settlement and probably, as a result, the provision of basic municipal services. They had also, however, entrained a more significant change, or at least hastened the coming of the inevitable. By committing itself to major capital expenditures at Sachs Harbour, the government<sup>1</sup> acknowledged a change in the status of the community from an outlying camp to a permanent village. Sachs Harbour would henceforth be administered as any other permanent village, eligible for all services provided at any other settlement of such size, and its inhabitants eligible for all programmes applying to settlement residents everywhere.<sup>2</sup> Since government administrative and service programmes are generally undifferentiated across the North it seems not unfair to say that Sachs Harbour had become simply one of many settlements, to be treated just as the others.

Three visits by the author to Sachs Harbour since 1967, although brief, have provided some insight into subsequent developments. Here will be examined some of the changes brought about by the school, and particularly the impact of the housing and utility programmes, before commenting on the general relationship between the Bankslanders and the bureaucracy.

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<sup>1</sup>Since 1967, a separate territorial government with increasing powers has been established at Yellowknife. To avoid confusion and datedness, the term "government", as used in the ensuing discussion, refers to either or both the federal and territorial governments and their programmes, unless they are specifically differentiated.

<sup>2</sup>It is not meant to imply that the community had previously received no attention at all from the government, or had been unreasonably excluded from such programmes. The Bankslanders had indeed had increasing contact with government programmes during previous years, as documented both in this report and in the Area Survey report of 1966. Yet the Sachs Harbour conference and its aftermath certainly represented a watershed, since which time the course of this development has greatly accelerated.

## **The school**

A two-room school was erected in the summer of 1968 and classes began that autumn. It was neither an economical, portable building, nor a multi-purpose complex, as originally suggested. A large, permanent structure of standard plan was built, along with two separate teacherages, at a total cost of \$301,075. Territorial education officials periodically reminded Ottawa of the community's original request (*see* Appendix A), but in view of the Minister's commitment to have the school completed by the fall of 1968, such considerations were apparently sacrificed for the sake of speed. There was in fact no further consultation with the community regarding the design and potential uses of the building itself, nor was there any discussion between government agencies about utilizing the building for a variety of programmes. It was, from the point of view of the Education and Engineering divisions in Ottawa, a straightforward administrative package like any other.

It is generally agreed that the day school itself, after three years of operation, has been a success. From the parents' point of view, there were many adjustments to be made. Suddenly there were mouths to feed and bodies to clothe all year round. Housing had to be enlarged, and a daily routine followed of getting the children off to school in the morning and having lunches ready at noon. The annual round of activities has also had to be adjusted more to the school year, although happily, there has been some flexibility in the school calendar. Many of these problems were neither clearly foreseen nor entirely welcomed, but in the end the parents have willingly accommodated themselves to all of them. School attendance is good, and the younger children at least seem to prefer being home. Although minor complaints are inevitable, the teachers so far have been well regarded by both children and parents. Some likely consequences of a local day school were outlined in the previous chapter. One cannot yet evaluate the long range impact of the school, but our original hypotheses still seem reasonable.

## **Housing and utilities**

Housing has not been a major problem at Sachs Harbour, as it was in many other Arctic settlements. Since the mid-1950s, as Sachs Harbour has become a more settled community, families have built increasingly permanent and elaborate houses. Some borrowed from the Eskimo Loan Fund, others used surplus monies from good trapping seasons, but by 1966 all lived in frame houses. As noted in the previous chapter, these houses were designed, constructed and paid for by the trappers themselves. Most have considered their houses to be of adequate size, although some, especially with large families, have been hard pressed to afford adequate space and sufficient fuel to heat it. The Bankslanders are proud of their houses and have generally viewed with some contempt those provided by the government in other settlements under the early housing programmes, particularly with regard to their design and construction.

The Bankslanders have no legal title to the land around their houses, but locally such areas, including the beach fronts, are considered the property of the householder. The village has had no legal survey, nor is there even a rudimentary delimitation of the boundaries of individual "properties." Yet so far as the villagers are concerned, their right of tenure and their freedom to use their land as they wish is unquestioned.

In recent years, there has been a growing desire for utilities, particularly electricity and an improved summer water supply.<sup>1</sup> There has also been a constant concern over the high cost of fuel oil. With the children home all year and the houses enlarged, many families now find their fuel bills nearing \$1,000 annually.

It was hoped that power and water facilities would be generally provided along with the school, although the villagers were anxious to obtain them even if the school were not built. Some expressed willingness to pay the freight and installation if the government would provide surplus generators from former DEWline sites. In fact, utilities have been made available with the school, although slowly.

Power for the school was originally provided from the DOT generators northwest of the settlement. At first, only those houses west of the school, near the power line, received electricity. Extensions have since been made, and power poles have been erected to the east end of the village, although the most easterly group of houses are not yet hooked up. A new power plant was constructed in the village in late 1970, which now provides sufficient power for the school and the villagers, many of whom have purchased heavy electrical appliances in recent years. Household water delivery by tracked vehicle began in 1970.

It would seem that the Bankslanders' original desire for utilities has been satisfied. Two complicating factors have since arisen, however. One is that the provision of these utilities has allowed government agencies to provide high quality housing and services to their representatives at Sachs Harbour. The RCMP constructed new quarters and the detachment is now staffed by one married constable rather than two single men. Both the teachers' and the administrator's houses have been constructed for married personnel. These are all provided with electricity, furniture, appliances, running water and flush toilets at standard government rentals. Thus, not only has the white community at Sachs Harbour grown, but its standard of living, especially in terms of shelter and utilities, is now very much higher than that of the native community, which was not previously the case. As in other Arctic settlements, transient whites can now bring many of the comforts of the south with them (without having to pay the true economic cost), and they no longer have to conform to local living standards.

The second factor is the implementation of the Northern Rental Housing Programme (formerly the Eskimo Rental Housing Programme). The purposes and mechanics of this programme have been described elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> and little elaboration is necessary here. It called for the erection of pre-fabricated houses of up to three bedrooms and 700 square feet of living space, for all native Indians and Eskimos living in northern settlements and desiring such houses. The houses are to be allocated by a local committee, and rented at a charge of 20 per cent of family income, not to exceed \$67.00 a month.<sup>3</sup> This rental includes not only the house, but fuel and municipal services as well.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For further information on this problem, see Usher, 1966.

<sup>2</sup>Canada, Dept. Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1968; Bruce, 1969; Thompson, 1969; Thomas and Thompson, in press.

<sup>3</sup>This will be raised to \$100 during late 1971. The maximum rate is considered commensurate with those paid by transient public servants for Crown housing.

<sup>4</sup>There are monthly quotas on services and should the tenant exceed these, he must pay for the additional services himself.

The rental housing programme represents a massive subsidy to native persons, although it should be noted that government employees in Crown housing are likewise subsidized. Even those families paying the maximum rent are barely covering the cost of their services, let alone amortizing the cost of their house, which is at least \$14,000. Although part of the rent is automatically applied as a purchase credit,<sup>1</sup> and it is also possible to obtain mortgages under a related programme to purchase the houses outright, no Eskimos have yet done so anywhere in the Arctic. This is because the subsidization of services in the rent has made home ownership an unattractive proposition in northern settlements, as will be discussed below. The government has become, in effect, landlord to virtually every native person in the North.

The need for such a programme in many Arctic settlements was unquestionable. At Sachs Harbour, however, the people had already built houses of a decent standard themselves. Tuberculosis and infant mortality, so commonly resulting from poor housing elsewhere, were almost unknown at Sachs Harbour. Most members of the community could afford adequate shelter and services, or required only minor assistance such as loans. Just as important, the Bankslanders enjoyed the free use of their lands and the pride and independence of owning their houses. They had heard of the rental programme but were not interested in it. Moreover, several knowledgeable government representatives in the region had recommended against the general provision of rental housing at Sachs Harbour.

The Rental Housing Programme began in 1965, with the first units going to Eastern Arctic settlements, and the West to be included in subsequent years. Because the Bankslanders, as Eskimos, were eligible for this programme, the responsible territorial officials visited Sachs Harbour in 1969 to explain it. The initial reaction of most people was negative. In subsequent months, however, many families reconsidered, and the majority have since applied for rental housing. One house was delivered in late 1969, and several were expected by sea lift in 1971. Opinion on the merits of rental housing is now somewhat varied in the community, but falls essentially into three categories.

At one extreme are those families who even today adamantly refuse to have any part of the programme. They consider it a form of welfare and fear for the loss of their independence. They are satisfied with their present houses, and some are concerned with the implications for land rights. How, they ask, can they claim land rights over the island when by renting they acknowledge that they do not even own the land under their houses? Some have also suggested that if the government is willing to put so much money into Sachs Harbour, why does it not simply turn the funds over to the community and allow the people to decide on their own priorities.<sup>2</sup> These people, all active trappers or wage earners, are in the minority.

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<sup>1</sup>A three bedroom house costing \$14,000 can be purchased in a minimum of 19 years under this system.

<sup>2</sup>This would be legally impossible unless the village were incorporated as a hamlet under territorial legislation. This option is open to the villagers, although with the recent profusion of local organizations (*see below*), they will probably not apply for hamlet status in the near future.

At the other extreme are widowed heads of families, and older couples, often reliant on welfare, who want rental housing and by any standard are entitled to it. These people now occupy the least adequate houses in the community. Their right is acknowledged by all; even those vociferously opposed to rental housing for themselves feel the welfare recipients should obtain the benefits of this programme. Yet both the potential recipients themselves and the other members of the community acknowledge this as a welfare need, not as part of a general programme to subsidize rental housing.

The middle and largest group consists of active trappers and wage earners who have come to accept the programme, but with great reluctance and ambivalence. In terms of the quality of shelter, the government houses would represent an improvement for some but not for others. The chief attraction of the programme to this middle group is the inclusion of fuel and municipal services in the rent. They know very well that, especially with their children at home, they can no longer maintain their own houses as cheaply as they could obtain shelter under the rental programme, even if they pay at the maximum schedule. Many are acutely aware of the disadvantages, and share some of the feelings of those who have refused houses. Had other options been available they would have preferred them, but given the choice they would rather have the rental programme than nothing at all. And they are mindful of the advantages that whites now enjoy in the community. As one man put it, "Now that I work for the government I might as well have a government house."

Almost all of the middle group would have refused rental housing had it not been for the matter of services. Many would have been glad to pay the full rental fee just for fuel and services, so long as they could keep their own houses, but this is simply not possible under the programme. This is because the federal government, on a national basis, is willing to subsidize rent under public housing programmes, but not home ownership. The Department of Indian Affairs, in order to have its own housing programme approved by Treasury Board, had to abide by this general principle. As in many such instances, whatever the merits of the general policy, the programme based on it is applied at the local level with what often seems a bizarre inflexibility. It is very difficult to explain to a person at Sachs Harbour why the government is willing to provide a house and services at a given monthly rate, but will not supply the services alone, even for the same rate.

The government offers a repurchase option to any Eskimo desiring rental housing who had already purchased a house under a previous housing programme. This does not apply to those already owning privately built houses. The Bankslanders will be unable to sell their existing houses, hence their investment in shelter to date will have been rendered valueless. It is possible for the government to purchase the present houses and rent them back to their former owners, but once compelled to rent, almost all would opt for a new "government house."

As mentioned, it is possible for an individual to purchase a government house, but one must have title to the land, otherwise only a 30-year lease is granted. There is some flexibility in mortgage payments under the programme, so the trapper's irregular income need not be an insurmountable obstacle. The problem is that under the purchase option, one would no longer be entitled to subsidized services but would have to pay for them at their full cost.

Home improvement loans are increasingly difficult to obtain. There was an Eskimo Housing Loan Programme, but this has expired, and since the rental housing programme came into effect, monies are no longer available from the Eskimo Loan Fund for the purchase or construction of low-cost housing. Loans for additions or improvements to existing buildings are still obtainable from the fund, but this option is rarely used because most Eskimos now rent. In any case, the same problem would exist: so long as the Eskimo persisted in owning his house, he would not be eligible for low cost services.

Originally desiring only services, the Bankslanders have discovered that in order to obtain them at reasonable cost, they must also accept rental housing. They have stated their objections but to no avail, and now there seems nothing else to do. Under such circumstances, the desire for independence is difficult to maintain. Four years ago, one trapper declared he would rather live in a tent than pay rent to someone, a view then typical of the community.<sup>1</sup> Now, in the words of one of the trappers, "We didn't ask for houses, but if the government wants to put them here and they are cheaper, we might as well have them."

It should be noted that territorial government officials, and particularly the housing officers in the Inuvik region, have generally been sympathetic to the Bankslanders' objections to the existing programme. They, however, only administer it, and must work within the confines laid down by the federal government in Ottawa, and the intermediary interpretations by the territorial government in Yellowknife.

The coming of rental housing has also more general implications for the community. The programme is not simply designed to provide shelter, but is also a plan for directed social change. It is normally accompanied by an education programme designed to instruct the future tenants on matters of "proper" housekeeping and maintenance of modern homes (for a comprehensive discussion of this programme and the problems of its implementation, *see* Thompson, 1969). In each community, a housing association is set up to administer the programme, nominally to place responsibility for control of rental housing in local hands, but in fact having quite restricted powers (*see* Thomas and Thompson, *in press*). The total programme is designed to "bring the Eskimo into the twentieth century," to familiarize them with the southern way of life and adapt more easily to it.

The Bankslanders have developed patterns of housekeeping and maintenance quite satisfactory, in their view, for life in their community. No matter, they will be taught new ones. The Bankslanders care little for organized committees, and feel they have enough with the Trappers' and Community Associations. No matter: they will have a Housing Association.<sup>2</sup> In short, the rental programme will force the Bankslanders to conform more and more to rules, regulations and modes of thought originating elsewhere, and being of questionable relevance to their present way of life.

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<sup>1</sup>Some trappers have been known to rent from others, particularly where a new immigrant to the island has the opportunity of renting from a Bankslander temporarily residing elsewhere. This is generally seen as a temporary arrangement until he builds his own house.

<sup>2</sup>The creation of a local housing association is not actually mandatory, since the community can allow the government full control of the administration of this programme. If local control is desired, however, it cannot be effected through another existing association. This provision is designed to obviate the possibility of a few local whites, who may be members of these other associations, dominating the operation of the housing programme.

Finally, the housing programme is generally implemented in the context of a town plan. The Bankslanders have had some experience with town planners, not all of it fruitful. During the last few years, a number of government or consultant planning teams have visited the community, usually for no more than a day, which has rendered communication between the villagers and the planners difficult. Seldom has there been mutual agreement about where things ought to go, and the Bankslanders have usually felt that the planners have not understood their concerns.<sup>1</sup> In the past, little has apparently come of these many plans.

With the housing programme, however, there has been rather more pressure on the villagers to have their houses placed in rows in the centre of the village. The sources of this pressure are not certain, but the Bankslanders were, during the winter of 1970-71, under the clear impression that they would not be able to have their new houses erected on their present lots. They were unanimously opposed to being pushed together in rows, but felt they could do little about it.

While such a plan would certainly render servicing easier and cheaper, it would be a disaster for the community. In Sachs Harbour, tight knit and isolated, the need for social space is as important as the physical need for large properties and beach fronts. Now, if two families are temporarily unhappy with each other, they need not come in contact for several days until the issue subsides. Now, a man can work outside his house in virtual solitude if he likes, and his children can play about the house without bothering the neighbours. With closely spaced houses set in rows, social tensions will inevitably increase. In Tuktoyaktuk, where housing has already been so arranged, just such problems have arisen, according to the Bankslanders.

In the outcome, most families were able to have their houses located as they desired. It is unfortunate, however, that a lack of proper communication and understanding between the Bankslanders and the planners should have given rise to such prolonged anxiety in the community.

### **The decline of local control**

The growth in size of the white community at Sachs Harbour, and its increasing differentiation from the native community, have already been noted. As educational and municipal services have been provided, the need has arisen, at least in the eyes of those providing the services, for an increasing number of outside personnel to administer them.

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<sup>1</sup>In 1967, a town plan for Sachs Harbour was being drawn up by the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa. As usual, a neat street grid with rows of houses had been superimposed in several colours on the blueprint of the existing pattern. The original blueprint showed all existing details faithfully, including two locally owned schooners which had been beached for some years. Next to these was the notation "Eskimo schooners, haul away." In their desire for orderliness, it apparently had not occurred to the responsible planners that these boats belonged to people who might have had other arrangements in mind.

Four years ago, the RCMP detachment handled all administrative matters in the settlement. When the school was built, some administrative duties were shifted to the principal. With the construction of a power house, a separate administrator has been appointed, who also acts as the power house operator.<sup>1</sup> Although many of the original police duties such as administration and patrol are no longer required, there is apparently no thought of closing the detachment.

The chief characteristic of the white community in any small northern settlement is that it is part of a colonial apparatus. That is to say, the creation of jobs, the determination of job functions, and the appointment of incumbents, are determined entirely by outside agencies. The people of Sachs Harbour were not consulted when the administrator's position was established, and most had no idea why an administrator had to be appointed at all. This is in spite of the fact that the administrator is the key medium of communication and interpretation between the Bankslanders and the bureaucracy. The Bankslanders are acutely aware of their helplessness in this regard. They see no alternative to silent acquiescence to the decisions of outside agencies to install or remove transient personnel, be they the Department of Indian Affairs, the police, or the missions. The greater the number of outside agencies in the community, the greater is their control over the life of the village, and the greater are the restrictions on local autonomy.

This is not a new process. Long before the school was built, the Bankslanders experienced outside decision-making without consultation, no matter how directly these decisions affected the community. In some cases, even existing institutions such as the Trappers' Association were bypassed. The examples are many, but in former days they were seen as intermittent or minor irritations. Today, however, the Bankslanders have become uncomfortably aware that this process of encroachment has accelerated rapidly since the school was established.

This consequence they had not really foreseen nor taken account of. Nor was this consequence entirely foreseen by the government, although one perceptive territorial official expressed doubt, in a memorandum to Ottawa,

that the people of Sachs Harbour realize that the building of a school in their community would, in a very short time, end the "closed corporation" type of settlement which exists at Sachs Harbour and would result in the breakdown of the very qualities which these people are seeking to maintain. In other words, [I am] not at all sure that the people there fully appreciate the implications of their request . . . (IAND/NAB 630/194).

Whether, armed with this foresight, the Bankslanders would have acted differently, perhaps even deciding against a school, is problematic. Perhaps this merely begs the question. Are the alternatives really only between exclusion from the potential benefits of government programmes and the loss of local control to outside agencies? Must the price of pride and independence be a condemnation to second-class citizenship?

The Bankslanders have often expressed to government officials their willingness to improve their community on their own. They have from time to time made this point with regard to education, municipal services, welfare, game and other matters. They

<sup>1</sup>An alternative solution would appear to have been to appoint a local person as power house operator, leaving administration, which is not a heavy load, with the principal.

would like the government to help them where they lack the skills, knowledge, and sometimes the money. But such initiatives, instead of being seized on, seem to be stifled. Such initiatives do not fit the confines of predetermined, general programmes which are easier for the bureaucracy to administer. Local officials may be sympathetic but they are also helpless. It is little wonder that one Bankslander should have commented ruefully that "the government is slowly bugging us up."

### **The Bankslanders' conception of government**

Much has been written of Eskimo attitudes to outsiders and particularly to government. Vallee (1962, esp. pp. 192-6) has described the perhaps extreme case of the Baker Lake people in the late 1950s. The Bankslanders have had much more worldly experience than the Eastern Arctic Eskimos. Wise in many of the ways of commerce, a number of the Bankslanders have also travelled elsewhere in the Territories and in southern Canada. They have sensed the rigid, impersonal ways of big cities and large office buildings; some have also read books and magazines; and of course the radio and the movies transmit information, however confusing.

Yet the conditions of daily life on Banks Island are far removed from those of the outside world, and some of the notions described by Vallee are also found at Sachs Harbour, particularly among older people. The Baker Lake people viewed whites, and particularly the government, as having unlimited power which they wielded arbitrarily (Vallee, 1962:194). While the Bankslanders sense that there are limits on government power, they are not sure where these limits lie, and they do tend to see this power as arbitrarily wielded. They also consider the government to have unlimited spending power, and virtually all white people to be rich.

These ideas are reinforced by the fact that government officials seem to be able to charter aircraft at will to visit Sachs Harbour. The Bankslanders tend to be cynical about these visits; they can see no purpose in government people breezing around the settlement for a couple of hours, having coffee with one or two people who are not necessarily representative of community opinion, then returning to Inuvik with no apparent accomplishments. If all that money can be spent on charters (to say nothing of the host of expenditures on projects elsewhere which are considered to be bungled or useless), they reason, the government's tightness over capital expenditures must be due to ill will, incompetence or foolishness, but certainly not to an actual shortage of money.

In recent years, many Eskimos have begun to learn that government, especially at the local level, can be manipulated to their advantage (*see* Arbess, 1967). Because there has not been a large government representation at Sachs Harbour until very recently, the Bankslanders have hardly begun to learn these skills. Yet one may assume that unless the nature of the government presence at Sachs Harbour is rather different from elsewhere, the development of such skills, and of "hostile dependency" on whites, as described by Smith in the Mackenzie Delta (1971: 109-13), will only be a matter of time.

At present, however, the Bankslanders' experience of the outside world and of government has been in some respects opposite that of most Eskimos. They have some inkling of how it operates elsewhere, but very little of how it operates locally. The

Bankslanders recognize that the government is an enormous organization and that its workings are unbelievably complex. From their distant vantage point, they comprehend its vastness, but not its structure, stratification and divisions. Hence it appears to them monolithic. They find it difficult to grasp that there are a multitude of separate departments, branches, divisions and agencies, not all having the same approaches and priorities. It is astounding to them that these individual units, and the people working in them, are often unaware of the activities of the others. Although government organization is incomprehensible to the Bankslanders, they feel that public servants at least should know and be responsible for all aspects of it. Hence it frustrates them that individual public servants have such restricted responsibilities and that so little can be accomplished by dealing with any one of them. Whom one sees or to whom one writes in order to solve a particular problem remains largely mysterious, especially in recent years, due to the periodic reorganizations of the Department of Indian Affairs as well as the transfer of many of its functions to the territorial government.

If power is so limited at the lower levels, then it must reside with the “big shots” at the top — the Minister of Indian Affairs or the Prime Minister perhaps. There must be someone who knows everything that is going on and is responsible for it, and in the Bankslanders’ minds he must be the real culprit behind the actions they do not like. They feel there must be someone, somewhere, who can give an immediate and definite answer to their questions. Those who cannot do so are considered incompetent and useless, or else they must be covering up for the ultimate locus of power.<sup>1</sup>

That there should be structural constraints and impediments to efficient and, to the Bankslanders, desirable decision-making in government is not understood. These deficiencies are seen in personal terms. If their interests are adversely affected, there must be someone who does not understand their interests, or who does not have them at heart, or possibly someone who is crooked. In short, the government is not only monolithic, but sometimes also malevolent.<sup>2</sup>

The ultimate locus of secular power is of abiding interest to the Bankslanders. Many suspect it must lie with the Queen or the Governor General. The sense of loyalty to the Crown is strong on the Island, especially among older people. Several Bankslanders have had occasion to meet royalty or its representatives during northern tours,

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<sup>1</sup>Yet there are a number of outsiders, including government officials, who through long association the Bankslanders have come to like and respect. Such persons are exempted from their general view of outsiders, and indeed the Bankslanders often feel sorry that these otherwise decent people have so little power to correct things. Most Bankslanders are well disposed to individual visitors, and prolonged personal contact means much to them. Their dislike is reserved primarily for those who remain essentially anonymous to them, or who clearly represent interests of which they are fearful.

<sup>2</sup>And so also is the outside world, for as government is so omnipresent in the North, it is assumed to be likewise elsewhere. Many Bankslanders find it hard to imagine the diversity of southern Canadian society; hard to imagine that there are many white people outside who do not work for the government and do not necessarily share its views; that there are white people who are poor, who work with their hands, who live in isolated places and face many of the same conditions of life as they do, and who are likewise alienated from government and suspicious of its workings.

and they treasure these experiences and the mementos they have of them. Although they are aware of royalty's limited constitutional role, the feeling lingers that if the government did something bad enough, the Queen could intercede against or overrule it. She, then, or the Governor General on her behalf, are seen as ultimate and benevolent protectors.

Thus, the Bankslanders have some idea of the outline and dimensions of government, but its structure, mechanics and even its purposes remain largely a mystery. The Department of Indian Affairs is the most salient agency of government to the Bankslanders, but it and the government as a whole are often interchangeable in their minds. Basically they are suspicious of government. Little or nothing in their experience suggests that the government is an instrument belonging to them and serving them, and over which they may exert some control. In other words, the ideas of citizenship and democracy, which are common currency in southern Canada, are only vaguely comprehended by most Bankslanders. To them, the government is an alien, largely uncontrollable and potentially destructive force. By protest or agitation, some concessions may be extracted, but often the difficulty and even distastefulness of such activity make it not worth the effort. Normally avoidance, or if necessary acquiescence, are seen as the best policies. The latter can always be mitigated by passive non-compliance. Thus we see on Banks Island a subtle but steady erosion of local autonomy and personal independence, values held dear by its inhabitants, but which they can see no way of defending.



## CHAPTER THREE

### OIL AND TRAPPING

#### Government objectives

The federal government has an enormous range of responsibilities, and the many programmes required to meet these must be developed by a variety of government departments and agencies. As specific programmes are developed and applied, their inter-relations may seem unclear, and contradictions may emerge. The Bankslanders' confusion about the objectives and mechanics of government is sometimes shared by Canadians as a whole and indeed by public servants themselves.

In recent months, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has been developing a series of policy objectives which attempt to clarify and specify the very general statutory responsibility of the Minister to "undertake, promote, or recommend policies and programs for the further economic and political development of the Northwest Territories and Yukon Territory" (*Statutes of Canada*, 1966-67, Ch. 25, Sect. 18b). These objectives were outlined at the Fifth National Northern Development Conference in Edmonton in November, 1970, by the Honourable Jean Chrétien, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, and Mr. John A. MacDonald, the former Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs.

The most significant objectives mentioned in their speeches (Chrétien, 1970; MacDonald, 1970) may be summarized as follows:

- 1) To provide a rising standard of living and quality of life for northern residents, particularly the indigenous peoples, by methods compatible with their own preference and aspirations.
- 2) To encourage viable economic development in the north so as to realize its potential contribution to the national economy.
- 3) To maintain and enhance the northern environment with due consideration to social and economic development.
- 4) To maintain Canadian sovereignty and security in the north.

The Department of Indian Affairs is also working towards a system of priorities for these objectives. In a recent speech, the Minister said,

In my mind our first objective should be to advance the social development of the first residents of the North. Combined with that should be a desire to protect the northern environment, and to ensure that those who wish to follow the traditional ways of hunting and trapping can do so without fear for their livelihood. Finally, we should develop the natural resource wealth of the North: first, so that it will benefit the people who live there, and secondly, so that it will contribute to Canada's overall development (Chrétien, 1971).

These objectives are surely supported by the great majority of Canadians as well as by northerners themselves. Yet their attainment poses a serious problem for the Canadian government and particularly for the Department of Indian Affairs. Any particular programme must be assessed in terms of its conformity to these objectives. In doing so, it may be found that these objectives are sometimes incompatible and that one must be sacrificed for another.<sup>1</sup> The Banks Island case is significant because it throws the potential contradiction between these objectives into sharp relief.

The rationales for oil development in the North are many, and superficially at least, are consistent with the statutory responsibilities of the Minister and with most of the objectives stated above. The occupancy and use of territory clearly enhances the assertion of sovereignty over it.<sup>2</sup> Royalties, export revenues, increased investment and tax revenues are all seen as national benefits, and hence oil development will increase the North's contribution to the Canadian economy.<sup>3</sup> Benefit to the indigenous people will, it is asserted, be derived through increased employment and business opportunities, although to what extent and for how long has never been made explicit.

Each of these points may be debated, but there is no doubt that a *prima facie* case can be made that the development of northern oil and gas resources is not only desirable but also consistent with departmental objectives. Just such a case has been made on many occasions by senior departmental officials. In the absence of statements to the contrary, it may be assumed that the department sees these rationales as applying with equal force throughout the North, regardless of the specific circumstances of individual communities or regions; or at least that the department does not see these local considerations as sufficiently important to affect the application of development policy.

If oil development is indeed in accord with departmental objectives, one would expect it to be welcomed by northerners and the general Canadian public alike. If such a welcome were not forthcoming, some reassessment would be in order. Perhaps the disapprovers are ignorant of the real consequences of development, or they may even be perversely unwilling to act in their own interests. In this case, improved consultation, explanation and education regarding the programme would be necessary. Perhaps on re-examination one might find that there is some conflict between objectives, and that oil development serves some but not all of them. One would then have to decide which of the objectives were the most important and be prepared to sacrifice the others. Finally,

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<sup>1</sup>The Minister recognized these difficulties in his earlier speech, saying that "it is no good thinking that these objectives can be stated in such a clear-cut fashion that every situation can then be measured quite easily in their light." This qualification implies, presumably, not that the assessment of specific activities in terms of these objectives is inappropriate, but that this should be done with care and with due consideration of all factors.

<sup>2</sup>Some would argue that the largely foreign control of investment and activity in northern oil exploration, though consistent with *de jure* sovereignty, is prejudicial to *de facto* Canadian sovereignty in the North, but this issue is not central to the present discussion.

<sup>3</sup>Again, although beyond the scope of this report, there are counter arguments that foreign control of the oil industry, and the export of crude oil, will result in a net extraction of wealth from Canada rather than an increase, and that the ultimate value of the resource to Canada will be greater if its exploitation is delayed.

it is possible that although all are agreed on the broad objectives, there are differing interpretations of their meaning and implementation. Policy makers would then have to examine the basis of these differences and establish how or even whether the differing views can be reconciled.

The events on Banks Island during the summer and fall of 1970, described in this chapter, suggest that there was indeed a conflict between departmental objectives with regard to oil development. The purpose of the ensuing analysis is to show which objectives were served in the outcome and why, as well as to relate the specific conflict to more general patterns. The analysis, resting as it does on an evaluation of the actual course of events rather than normative statements about departmental operations, is one of deeds, not words alone.

In the remainder of this chapter the development and resolution of the conflict is described in some detail, and the issues at stake are assessed. The agreements between the government, the oil companies and the trappers are outlined and evaluated for their effectiveness, and the points of view of each of the parties during and after the conflict are examined.

The rationale for this analytical approach has been stated in the Preface to this volume. The information contained in this chapter is derived from several sources. I made two visits to Inuvik and Sachs Harbour of about two weeks each in September 1970 and May 1971, as well as a brief visit to Inuvik in August 1971. Long prior association with the Bankslanders, as well as with many people in Inuvik, allowed me to obtain much information during these visits. I had many long talks with the Bankslanders themselves, attended some meetings at Sachs Harbour and listened to tape recordings of others. I also talked with administrative personnel in Sachs Harbour, Inuvik and Ottawa who were familiar with the situation, with wildlife and land use inspection personnel in Inuvik, and with executives of the Committee for Original People's Entitlement in Inuvik. To a limited degree I have also relied on newspaper accounts and other publicly available material. Descriptions of events in this chapter are therefore based on a variety of sources, thus enabling a cross-check for accuracy. Positions on issues are presented as they have been stated publicly or to me personally by the principals involved, and are not imputed. I have not relied on government files, or other confidential material not available to the public, for the information presented in this chapter.

Because the narrative sections of this chapter are a composite account based on many sources, extensive documentation for each statement has been eschewed in favour of readability. Only documentary sources are specifically acknowledged.

### **Oil exploration on Banks Island**

On 26 June 1970, representatives of Elf Oil Exploration and Production Canada Ltd., and Deminex (Canada) Ltd. arrived at Sachs Harbour to advise the community that they held exploration permits for large areas of Banks Island, and would commence seismic exploration during the winter of 1970-71. The dismay expressed by the villagers came as a surprise to both the oil exploration companies and to the federal government, although it need not have done so. Some explanation of the background preceding these events is necessary in order to understand these attitudes.

The federal government has increasingly taken the view that the only real basis for northern economic development lies in the primary non-renewable resource sector: minerals, oil and gas. Accordingly, during the 1960's, several incentive programmes were implemented in order to attract risk capital to this region of relative inaccessibility and high cost of operations.

The Canadian government has also made direct appeals to foreign and domestic capitalists to invest in northern resource exploration activity. For example, in March 1969, the Minister and Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs toured Europe to promote the North as an attractive investment area. The French state-owned oil agency, *Enterprise de Recherches et d'Activités Pétrolières*, parent of Elf Oil, was one of the many companies with whose representatives they talked. Discussions were also held with West German oil interests (Deminex is a West German-based oil company).

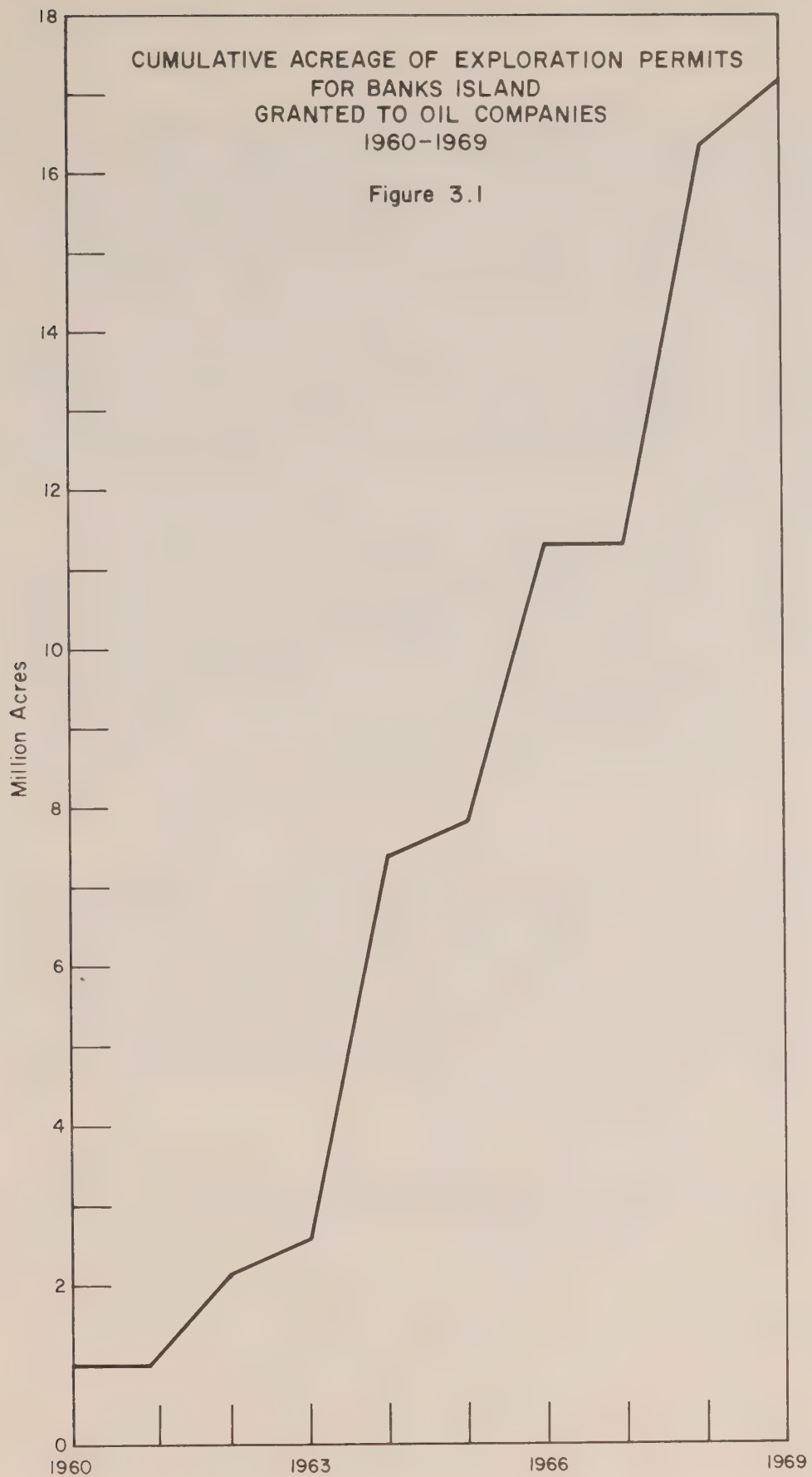
Oil and gas interest has centred in the northward extension of the western Canada sedimentary basin, and in the sedimentary provinces of the western and northern Arctic islands. Banks Island lies wholly within the latter area, and most of it is considered to have good prospects for the discovery of oil and gas in commercial quantities. Lands north of 70°N. were opened for exploration in 1960, and since then exploration permits have been granted for virtually all sedimentary basins within that area.

The first permits for Banks Island were taken out in 1960, and within ten years, exploration rights had been granted for the entire island and its adjacent waters (see Figure 3.1). The largest single permit holders are Elf Oil Exploration (28.1 per cent of the island), Panartic Oils Ltd. (27.9 per cent), and Amoco Canada (13.4 per cent). Twenty other companies share the remaining 30.6 per cent of the island's acreage.

About two-thirds of all exploration permits were granted before 1968, and hence are valid for eight years from date of issue, with a renewal period of six years. Permits issued subsequently are valid in the first term for only six years, with a six-year renewal period. To date, no production leases have been granted on Banks Island, nor on any of the other Arctic islands.

Needless to say, all companies applied for exploration permits in good faith, having met the prerequisites for obtaining them and with the intention of following all existing regulations for exploration laid down by the federal government. The Oil and Mineral Division of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development had also discharged its duties in accordance with its terms of reference. So long as the applicants fulfilled the requirements of the *Canada Oil and Gas Land Regulations* and had paid the requisite fees, the granting of a permit was virtually automatic.

What had escaped consideration, apparently, was that the Bankslanders had trapped on the island since 1928; that they had been granted exclusive trapping rights by the territorial government to the southern two-thirds of the island in 1963, and that this had been extended to cover the entire island in 1966. Legally, the nature of the two rights (exploration and trapping) to the same territory was quite distinct. Yet the potential for conflict should not have been altogether unforeseen. Either no responsible official had considered this possibility or it had not been communicated to the Oil and Mineral Division. Certainly it was not communicated to the oil companies when they applied for their permits.



On the other hand, neither were the Bankslanders informed that exploration rights were being granted to oil companies, let alone what the future consequences of this might be. The Bankslanders, like other inhabitants of the Western Arctic, had been vaguely aware since the early 1960s that “people were looking for oil” in the region. Who these people were, what plans they had, what the manner of their exploration techniques would actually be, what rights they had, and what the implications of their activities would be were essentially matters of speculation and rumour.

Aerial geophysical work was first conducted on Banks Island in the summer of 1966, using Sachs Harbour as a base. Small crews conducting brief aerial surveys were nothing new to the Bankslanders, and thus no special significance was attached to this event. To the extent that the people thought about oil development on the island at all, it was conceived in extremely vague terms as somehow being a potential source of money to them.

That the oil companies and the Bankslanders were ignorant of each other's interests and objectives in the first instance is not surprising. Yet both were clients of the same department of the federal government, a department responsible for granting both exploration and trapping rights<sup>1</sup> as part of its broader responsibilities for both northern economic development and the welfare of the indigenous people. Only the Department of Indian Affairs could have been expected to provide the necessary links of communication.

### **The conflict**

So long as the granting of permits remained merely a paper transaction, mutual ignorance was of no consequence. But exploration permits carry work requirements, and in 1970, several of the permit holders sought to fulfill them. Elf and Deminex (the latter chiefly on the behalf of Amoco) made their intentions known to the department early in the year. When oil exploration is to be conducted within migratory bird sanctuaries, as was the case on Banks Island, permits must also be obtained from the Canadian Wildlife Service, which was then also an agency of the Department of Indian Affairs. These permits were issued as early as 14 April 1970. Work plans were filed with the Oil and Mineral Division shortly thereafter.

For the oil companies, these were the final stages in the preparation of an exploration programme costing over \$5 million. Funds and manpower for these projects had already been allocated and indeed equipment was by then in transit. Other subcontracting firms were also involved which had even less reason to be aware of the Bankslanders' interests than the permit holders themselves. Oil company officials visited Sachs Harbour on 25 June merely to inform the Bankslanders of a programme already under way, and to enlist local co-operation and possibly labour.

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<sup>1</sup>The granting of trapping rights has been delegated to the territorial government. The Commissioner of the N.W.T. (and hence his staff) are, however, responsible to the Minister of Indian Affairs.

The oil company representatives arrived at Sachs Harbour almost totally ignorant of the nature of the community and of the interests and concerns of the trappers. This was in spite of the fact that they were accompanied by a federal government representative from Inuvik. The oil men were apparently unaware that the community held trapping rights to the entire island. They did not know that for both economic and social reasons, casual labour offered at \$1.67 per hour would be more of an insult than an enticement. They did not know that the distribution of free cigarettes might be interpreted as a cheap bribe. When the Bankslanders expressed fears about the effect of seismic work on trapping and hunting, the oil men tried to reassure them and said they would co-operate with the trappers. Such offers, though well meant, underestimated the nature of the problem. The oil men left this initial meeting apparently satisfied, thinking that since only doubts and fears were expressed rather than firm opposition, the villagers would ultimately be won over.

It is not the Bankslanders' way to react quickly and firmly to proposals presented for the first time at a public meeting; rather, such proposals are discussed informally among groups of two or three people during the following days, while visiting, while hunting, or perhaps during a chance meeting while walking about the village. New arguments are presented and considered, then communicated to others. Slowly each person's appreciation of the problem grows, and a consensus begins to emerge. Hence opposition to the exploration programme was found to be firmer and more united at subsequent meetings. This has been interpreted by some as a result of outside influence. Although native rights activists from the mainland did indeed offer assistance to the Bankslanders, this interpretation completely misunderstands the process of opinion formation in the community.

The Bankslanders' opposition to oil exploration focused on three issues. The first was the concern for the effects on the island's ecology and hence their own economic well-being. The second was a less precise but nonetheless pervasive anxiety about the implications of oil development for the future of their community and way of life. The third was a sense of outrage over the lack of prior consultation and what they took to be an abrogation of their traditional rights. Questions of aboriginal land rights and related considerations were aspects of the third concern, but were probably not uppermost in the minds of the majority of trappers at that time. These concerns will be elaborated in subsequent sections.

By chance, the visit of the oil men preceded the planned Conference of Arctic Native People to be held at Coppermine, N.W.T., by a mere three weeks. The Bankslanders had already selected two delegates to this conference, which was to discuss mutual concerns, including aboriginal land rights, on an Arctic-wide basis for the first time.

Political awareness has grown rapidly in many parts of the Arctic during the past few years, and a number of native rights organizations have been established. Within the Western Arctic, the Committee for Original People's Entitlement (COPE) had been formed earlier in 1970, and many Bankslanders had already joined this organization. Like many northerners, they were aware of developments in neighbouring Alaska regarding native land rights and oil exploration.

Within a week or so of the first visit, a strong consensus of opposition to oil exploration had developed within the community. The Bankslanders enlisted the aid of COPE, and at the latter's suggestion one of the trappers went to Yellowknife on behalf of the Community Association to seek legal advice.

The delegates from Sachs Harbour attended the Coppermine Conference from 14 to 18 July. The session on the second morning was given over largely to a discussion of the impending exploration programme on Banks Island (Coppermine Conference . . . 1970). The Bankslanders explained their problem, and several other delegates commented on similar ecological disruptions which had occurred in their own areas. It was resolved to send a telegram to the Prime Minister with a copy to the Minister of Indian Affairs, calling for an immediate halt to oil exploration on Banks Island, for prior consultation with regard to the future activities of this nature, and for the recognition of aboriginal rights.<sup>1</sup> This telegram was signed by the two Sachs Harbour delegates, and bore the supporting signatures of 26 other delegates from 21 other communities (the text is contained in Appendix A).

A Toronto law professor, who had acted as an adviser at the Coppermine Conference, brought news of the meeting, and particularly of the Banks Island case, to the Toronto *Globe and Mail* on his return during the last week of July. The *Globe and Mail* broke the story on 28 July, and devoted editorial and feature attention to it during the following days (issues of 28 July, 1 August, 5 August and 18 August). Although the matter had received some attention in the northern press and in the *Edmonton Journal*, the *Globe* story gave it national prominence, and subsequent media and public reaction almost unanimously supported the Bankslanders in their stand, while criticizing the government's role.

In the meantime, representatives of Deminex met with the trappers at Sachs Harbour on 24 July, and Elf representatives did likewise on 29 July. At both meetings, relations were strained. The trappers raised questions concerning both wildlife protection and mineral rights. The trappers state that oil company officials told them not to publicize the issue through the media as "it would only cause trouble." This was interpreted by the trappers as a threat, although the companies may only have been requesting further mutual discussions unhindered by bad publicity. The result of these meetings was to deepen the Bankslanders' opposition to the exploration programme.

The Minister of Indian Affairs sent a telegram on 30 July arranging a meeting at Sachs Harbour between departmental officials and the community. This was followed by a specific response to the points raised in the Coppermine telegram, expressing surprise at the Bankslanders' concern over the planned seismic work, and giving assurances that the forthcoming land use regulations and scientific studies would be quite adequate to prevent any harmful consequences (*see* Appendix A). This second communication was delivered at the meeting on 5 August by the departmental delegates. The delegation consisted of two officials from the Northern Services Division and one

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<sup>1</sup>This last subject had been discussed during the previous day's sessions.

from the Canadian Wildlife Service, accompanied by a journalist on contract with the Northern Economic Development Branch<sup>1</sup> and a COPE representative from Inuvik.<sup>2</sup>

The departmental officials, some of whom were already personally known to the Bankslanders, made it clear that they had come to listen to their concern. They were well received although the Bankslanders unhesitatingly reiterated their fears for both the wildlife resources and their own community as a result of oil exploration. Thorough and sympathetic reports were submitted to the department, and in fact a moratorium on exploration was suggested pending adequate research.

The Bankslanders' response to the Minister's telegram, however, was less enthusiastic, because they remained quite unsatisfied by the assurances it contained. They requested a meeting with the Minister, which was arranged for 16 August during his already planned tour of the North. The Bankslanders, realizing the importance of this meeting, arranged to have their legal counsel present as well as a representative of COPE. The Minister was accompanied by the Chief of the Oil and Mineral Division. The meeting commenced with the legal counsel outlining the Bankslanders' demands. The lack of prior consultation and the lack of adequate regulations covering oil exploration activity were deplored. The Bankslanders would not be satisfied with compensation after the damage was done, and hence requested an immediate halt to all exploration until it could be conclusively demonstrated that such activity would not adversely affect wildlife. They further requested a definite response from the Minister on these matters during this meeting.

The Minister acknowledged that consultation should have occurred, but also stated that the people should have guessed that exploration would take place since it was occurring elsewhere. Now the problem was to cope with the existing situation. He assured the trappers that regulations would be formulated in advance of actual exploration, and that operations would be inspected by the department. He invited the trappers to participate in this inspection programme, and noted that the Canadian Wildlife Service was preparing a report on the situation as well.

Several trappers pointed out that they were also experts on Banks Island's wildlife, and asked why the Minister was not prepared to act on their advice. The Minister stated that it was possible to have both oil exploration and trapping and he wanted to find out the facts, then make a decision, but added that there was no proof that oil exploration would harm wildlife.

Legal counsel replied that the Minister did not yet know what the effects of oil exploration would be, and hence was not in a position to formulate regulations until this was known. The Minister acknowledged that it was within his power to halt the exploration programme, but pointed out that the companies had already dispatched their equipment; however, he said he would be in a position to make a decision before the trapping season began. Experimental seismic work could be conducted with the villagers observing, and in any case the seismic lines could be adjusted to avoid the traplines.

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<sup>1</sup>The contract consisted of a short-term assignment to visit Sachs Harbour with the departmental delegation and prepare an independent assessment of the situation for the department. The resulting 53-page report (including appendices) entitled "The Banks Island Conflict" was not made public.

<sup>2</sup>The COPE representative was invited by the contract journalist. The Department of Indian Affairs did not, at this or any subsequent time, recognize COPE as an interested party in the dispute.

The Minister also stated that if resources were discovered it could be of great benefit to the Bankslanders. Everyone had to cope with progress and there could be something to be gained. Discussion ensued on the nature of the exploration work and possible safeguards. Essentially, the Minister and the Chief of the Oil and Mineral Division continued to minimize the possibility of adverse effects, while the Bankslanders continued to express doubts.

The Minister declined to make any final decision on the programme at the meeting. He reiterated the promise that further tests would be undertaken before the trapping season (although the nature of these tests was not specified), and that a continuous inspection would be maintained over the operation. He believed that the work should not start until the ground was frozen, and offered an arrangement whereby the trappers could take part in the inspection and receive reimbursement for their time during the trapping season. He stated that it was too late to stop the oil companies now, but that actual work would not begin without his express permission, which would be granted on the basis of pre-season tests. Further, he undertook to call a halt to the programme at any time if adverse effects on wildlife were clearly occurring. Finally, he promised that communications would be better in future, and asked the Bankslanders to let him know if they had any complaints.

The meeting thus resulted in a stalemate. The Bankslanders remained unsatisfied by the Minister's undertakings and assurances, believing these did not meet their basic reservations about the programme. The Minister remained convinced that his proposals were adequate to prevent the dangers the Bankslanders feared.

Following the meeting, the Bankslanders decided to allow three weeks for a definite statement from the Minister before taking further action. In consultation with COPE and their lawyer, it was resolved that if no satisfactory solution was achieved by then, a court injunction would be sought to halt the seismic programme until adequate safeguards were provided. These plans were communicated to the Minister on 18 August.

### **The crisis**

By the end of August, Northern Economic Development Branch officials, with the approval of the Minister, had arrived at a "compromise" plan. In essence it merely specified in greater detail the Minister's proposals of 16 August. It called for proceeding with the exploration programme, subject to the specifications of the proposed land use regulations which were not then law, and subject to inspection by both government officers and the trappers themselves. A series of meetings was quickly arranged: government representatives would go to Calgary on 2 September and to Sachs Harbour on 3 September to seek the cooperation of all parties. Agreement in principle was reached with the exploration companies in Calgary, whose equipment had by then already been off-loaded at their base camps at Johnson Point and Fish Lake.

The Bankslanders were only advised of the meeting a few days in advance. They were not entirely aware of its purpose, especially since the government delegation did not include senior officials. Their view seems to have been that it was just another meeting at which little would be resolved.

COPE executives also learned of the meeting, but could not ascertain its exact date. The trappers wanted COPE representation at the meeting, but were leery of having to pay their air fare, especially since they were unsure of the significance of the meeting. Radio-telephone connections between Sachs Harbour and Inuvik were quite poor during these few days and communication was difficult. During one conversation, a COPE executive tried to warn the trappers not to commit themselves to anything at the meeting unless they had their lawyer and a COPE representative there, but at this point voice communication completely faded out. COPE representatives tried to get to Sachs Harbour for the meeting, but they could not find out from departmental representatives in Inuvik (who were responsible for the local arrangements) when the charter would be leaving, nor even which plane would be used. In the end, the government and company party transferred directly from the scheduled flight from Edmonton to a chartered aircraft at the airport, without even going into Inuvik. Although there was room on the charter, it was by then too late for anyone from COPE to get on.

The Bankslanders' lawyer in Yellowknife was at this time on vacation. Ottawa officials claim to have contacted his office before the meeting, but the lawyer claims that he was not notified although his secretary had instructions to relay such messages to him during his absence. In any case, as a result the Bankslanders were unrepresented at this meeting by either their lawyer or COPE.

The government delegation consisted of three officials from the Northern Economic Development Branch, headed by the Chief of the Oil and Mineral Division, as well as the Territorial Superintendent of Game. They were accompanied by two representatives each from Elf and Deminex. Virtually all of the trappers were present at the meeting. To the Bankslanders, it appeared a contest between two adversaries: the government and the oil companies on one side, using glib assurances and big words, and themselves on the other side, unrepresented by anyone who really understood what was going on.

This was doubtless not the conscious intent of the government delegation. Yet it is unfortunate that a government department responsible for the welfare of native peoples should have appeared as adversaries to a group of Eskimos, and should have been party to an important agreement with that group without ensuring that they were properly represented by whatever legal or other local counsel they had designated to act on their behalf. It is unfortunate, too, that the feeling remains strong among both the Bankslanders and COPE officials that such representation was consciously and deliberately excluded from the meeting.

It might be noted that those who knew the least about wildlife and ecology were also those most insistent in downgrading the potential adverse effects of the exploration programme. In addition, the government and the oil companies informed the Bankslanders only of the immediate work plans, and failed to add that if there were any promising results, seismic lines would subsequently be run much closer together and exploration activity might become extremely concentrated in some areas.

There is a feeling among some prominent whites in Inuvik that the Bankslanders wanted to handle the case themselves and were quite capable of defending their own interests. This notion appears to stem from the observed self-sufficiency of the Banks-

landers and their canniness in business dealings. The notion is, however, quite incorrect. The Bankslanders were most unhappy about being unrepresented at the meeting, especially in view of the importance it turned out to have had. Moreover, this was not a straight-forward business deal. The Bankslanders were being asked to agree to a programme having profound implications for their future, and involving a number of technical considerations of which they had little or no knowledge. Although they entered the meeting with the same caution they would have used in a business deal, they did not have the same kind of "savvy" about how to handle it. They were unsure of the intentions of their adversaries and unsure of the nature and significance of the programme to which they were being asked to agree. They knew only that they were defenceless; that they had no way of arguing against the "smooth talk and big words;" that there was a united front of the companies and the government, even including game officials, against them.

The Bankslanders say they were told, in effect, that there was no use fighting the exploration programme and that the government's proposals were the best that could be done about it. The Bankslanders saw no alternative but to go along with them. The following day they reported to COPE and to the media that they would not proceed with the injunction, because they felt they had neither the money nor the ability to take on both the government and the oil companies. Resentful and beaten, they realized that they were going to have to live with oil exploration, and therefore accept whatever concessions were offered and make the best of them. Their resistance was broken. A few wished to carry on the struggle but knew that unless the community was united in doing so, it could not be won.

Two weeks later, the land use inspector came to Sachs Harbour to explain the regulations under which the oil companies had agreed to operate and to outline his own duties and powers. Subsequently a trappers' meeting was held to arrange a rotating system whereby individual trappers would go out with the exploration crews on inspection.

### **The issues**

Why had the Bankslanders fought the exploration programme, and what had they feared from it? Chiefly, they feared for their livelihood. They knew little of the actual nature of seismic exploration except that it would involve blasting as well as the frequent transit of heavy machinery and aircraft. They were concerned that this would occur along their trapping routes; that physical damage might be done to their traps and caches, and that foxes might temporarily be scared away from their traplines. They were also concerned about the more general effects of continuous high noise levels, diesel fumes, compaction and windrows created by heavy equipment, and the relatively intense and widespread human activity. They feared these might drive game away from large areas at least temporarily, and especially that they might affect denning and reproductive behaviour. Damage to lemming habitat and fox dens, long-term alterations of caribou and fox migration patterns, failure of caribou and foxes to breed, and cannibalism by foxes of their young were all seen by the trappers as possible consequences of seismic work. In addition they feared the possibility of marine seismic work and its potential effects on seals.

Concern was also expressed about general environmental damage such as trenching and gullyng of tundra areas due to the passage of heavy tractors, as well as pollution from garbage dumps, supply dumps and fuel storage facilities. The trappers had heard of damage done elsewhere in the North by the oil industry, particularly on the Tuk Peninsula during the mid-1960s, and expected it would be worse on Banks Island due to the shorter growing season and the more delicate nature of the tundra. Indeed, one of the trappers had attended a scientific conference on the tundra environment the year before at the University of Alberta.

The Bankslanders felt not only that oil exploration could destroy the basis of their livelihood, but also that it might leave nothing in its place. They considered labouring jobs with the oil companies an unsatisfactory alternative because they would be less remunerative than trapping,<sup>1</sup> certainly less enjoyable, and very possibly short lived. If wildlife were destroyed and oil were not found, they would be left with nothing. If oil were found, it might be held in reserve for many years; but even if it were produced they feared they would derive no benefit from it in terms of either land rights or production royalties.

The Bankslanders were pessimistic about the prospects for themselves and their community. They foresaw Sachs becoming another welfare town, robbed of its independence and overrun by outsiders. Although they were less able to articulate it, the Bankslanders feared the destruction of their community and their values as well as of wildlife. They recognized that not only their economy but their very way of life, which was also rooted in the land, was threatened.

Were the Bankslanders' fears justified? With regard to terrain damage, much experience has been gained since the mid-1960s, and it is technically possible to reduce it to a minimum. Whether all geophysical operations, if unregulated, would ensure that damage is in fact minimized, is another question. The department's proposed land use regulations had not then been promulgated, and the companies were not legally obliged to abide by them. The Bankslanders would have had to depend on their good will alone. Specific damage to traps and caches would probably have been minimal as seismic lines are laid out in grids, and according to the work programmes submitted, these crossed many traplines but seldom paralleled them for any distance.

Of the more general possibility of deleterious effects on caribou and arctic fox populations, little can be said with assurance. Scientific knowledge of this type is almost entirely lacking, especially on arctic foxes. On Banks Island, both species appear to constitute distinct resident populations. Since oil exploration will be covering most of the island, it is possible that it may have a considerable impact on the entire population of each of these species. Both caribou and arctic foxes appear to be wide-ranging: they are by no means restricted to small, individual territories. This is an important difference from most animal populations in more southerly, wooded regions, where damage in a limited area may have little or no effect on neighbouring populations, and one which a

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<sup>1</sup>The oil companies offered the Bankslanders \$1.67 per hour for labouring jobs. The prevailing government rate for such work in the settlements is \$3.12, and as noted in Volume Two, Chapter Three, the trappers' average earnings are very similar to the latter rate if converted to a standard hourly basis.

number of people who have tried to reassure the Bankslanders do not seem to have comprehended. Whatever has been learned of the effects of oil exploration on fauna in Alberta and the Mackenzie Valley is probably of limited value in assessing the Banks Island situation. Although studies are now being conducted of caribou populations on the North Slope of Alaska, firm evidence is not yet available.

Both foxes and caribou are present virtually everywhere on Banks Island, although not much is known about absolute or even relative variations in density or carrying capacity. As discussed in Volume Two, Chapter One of this report, it seems likely that the lowland areas of the central and western parts of the island are the most productive. In the case of arctic foxes, the Bankslanders believe that the main breeding grounds are in the northern part of the island, and that this untrapped area (which they have incorporated into their registered trapping area in order to protect it) yields the bulk of foxes they obtain. The adequacy of this hypothesis has been questioned in Volume Two, but no positive evidence exists to refute it. There is no question that foxes do in fact den and breed all over the island, including the trapped areas but again, regional concentrations are little known. Caribou appear to be concentrated in the south central part of the island during the fall and winter, but by and large, calving occurs in the more northerly areas.

It is important to recall that the Bankslanders did not insist that damage would definitely occur; they merely suggested that it was possible and indeed probable in their opinion, that the effects outlined earlier might take place. It may be that these fears were exaggerated, but in the view of competent wildlife biologists they were not unfounded. Yet several officials from both the Department of Indian Affairs and the oil companies have told the Bankslanders that these things would not happen, or that the planned regulations and modifications would be sufficient to prevent their occurrence. This they had no right to do, since there is very little scientific information on which to base such statements. Many people have opinions about the likelihood of such occurrences, but no one knows for certain. The only way such claims could be validated or disproved is through a long-term research programme, probably extending at least four or five years in the case of foxes in order to trace developments over a complete population cycle. Such a study would require a complete analysis of the distribution and dynamics of the fox population on the island, as well as of territorial, migratory, denning and reproductive behaviour, *prior* to the commencement of unnatural disruptions. It would also require an investigation of the problem of stress: whether noise, fumes and high levels of human activity are indeed stressful for foxes and if so, what their response is to such stress and whether it varies with sex, age or season. No such comprehensive studies have been carried out on Banks Island or anywhere else in the Arctic, nor has even a detailed methodology for such studies been elaborated.<sup>1</sup>

As for the Bankslanders' fears regarding their community and way of life, evidence from other northern areas, as well as recent experience on Banks Island itself, gives little ground for optimism. The decline of local autonomy in recent years, and the ero-

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<sup>1</sup>A review of existing knowledge is given in Volume Two, Chapter One.

sion of the essential and distinctive attributes of the community, have already been documented. For the Bankslanders, direct contact with the oil industry, especially in work situations, can only serve to accelerate these trends.

The Bankslanders did not call for a total and permanent ban on exploration. They requested that exploration and drilling first be conducted on islands uninhabited by people, and the necessary scientific research be done to show one way or another the effects of such activity. They were not against oil exploration as such, for if they could be shown that damage were nonexistent or minimal, they would have much less objection to such activity on Banks Island.

The evidence of man's ability to destroy his environment unwittingly needs no elaboration. In effect the Bankslanders were fighting for a fundamental principle of resource development: if the consequences of development are unknown, they should be determined as far as possible *before* deciding whether to proceed with such development. In the view of many people today, this is a principle so correct, especially where large scale and possibly irreparable damage may occur, that there can be no excuse for departing from it. This view is clearly not shared by the Department of Indian Affairs, since it saw fit to allow exploration to proceed in the absence of any knowledge of the consequences.

### **The agreements**

The compromise programme consisted of four principal elements; the protection of terrain and wildlife, inspection of seismic work, compensation, and research. The agreements between the government and the oil companies are set out in a document entitled *Schedule of Operating Conditions, Oil and Gas Exploration, Banks Island, N.W.T.* . The government's undertakings to the Bankslanders are contained in correspondence to the Community Association, or were given as verbal assurances.

#### *Terrain and Wildlife*

Terms and conditions were laid down for the companies regarding the location and dates of operation, the types of equipment to be used, land clearing, stream crossings, camp sites, disposal of debris, garbage and disused equipment and buildings, and fuel storage. These were based on the proposed Territorial Land Use Regulations which have since been published in Part One of the *Canada Gazette*, 19 June 1971, but were elaborated in more detail.

The agreed terms of operation applied almost entirely to the protection of terrain. It would appear that they are well suited to this purpose, and that so long as they are followed and enforced, terrain damage on Banks Island should be minimal. Their adequacy in protecting wildlife is another matter, and it must be stressed that these are two different problems.

The stipulations regarding wildlife are minimal. Section 9(a) states that

The operator shall not use machinery or otherwise conduct the geophysical operation so as to harass or unnecessarily disturb wildlife or damage wildlife habitat.

Other than forbidding such obvious abuses as deliberately running over fox dens or “buzzing” caribou in aircraft, this stipulation is meaningless. Section 9(b) states that

The operator shall agree to abide at all times with the instructions of a designated game official with respect to any matter pertaining to the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat.

If we accept the proposition that noise, diesel fumes, and the high incidence of human activity *may* have deleterious effects on wildlife, it is evident that no regulations of any kind short of a total ban on exploration can be certain or even likely to prevent this damage. If it is *possible* that such activity may disturb wildlife, the inadequacy of Section 9(a) becomes apparent. It should also be evident that given the lack of knowledge about which activities will disturb wildlife, the “designated game official” will hardly be in a position to give adequate instructions for the protection of wildlife.

Although the Bankslanders were assured that the seismic crews would proceed along any line only once and that they would be only a few hours or days at most in any given area, there was inevitably much more associated activity. In fact the Bankslanders were subsequently advised (by an inspector, not by any senior official of the department or the oil companies) that tractor trains would be hauling fuel along the seismic lines continuously throughout the winter. Aircraft were also to be used frequently. Just as some noise at least is an inevitable consequence of seismic work, so are diesel fumes. The regulations can reduce them perhaps (by restricting unnecessary travel), but they cannot eliminate them.

Neither can the regulations eliminate human activity. Exploration crews were quick to notice the presence of foxes near or even in their camps. Such curiosity, however, tends to be characteristic only of young foxes, and it cannot be said with certainty what the effect of numerous temporary camps all over the island will be on all classes of the fox population.

The timing of exploration on the island has been regulated chiefly with terrain rather than wildlife considerations in mind, the limiting dates being the freezing and thawing of the ground surface. A termination date of 30 April was initially suggested in connection with geese in the Banks Island Sanctuary Number One. This was subsequently modified to coincide with the close of trapping on 15 April. Yet some seismic lines were to go through the caribou’s fall rutting area, and work was to be in progress during that event, although not necessarily along those particular lines. Seismic activity in caribou rutting areas has not been regulated however. Although fox whelping occurs after the termination date, adults begin pairing as early as mid-February and start opening their dens in late March. Mating apparently occurs in early April. All this activity would be occurring while exploration was still in progress.

The regulations for the protection of wildlife are clearly inadequate and betray a profound misunderstanding of the problem. It is simply not possible to regulate activity affecting wildlife when the effects of that activity are unknown. There has also been much discussion of “critical areas” on the island. The notion has been consistently presented by government and oil company officials that damage can be minimized by avoiding these “critical areas,” especially since the actual seismic lines cover such a

tiny proportion of the island's surface. This is based on the unfounded premise that environmental damage will be limited to the seismic lines themselves. In any case, it is not known where the critical areas are or even how they are to be determined. It may be that all of Banks Island is a critical area.

### *Inspection*

It was agreed that continuous inspection would be maintained over the seismic operations. This would be supervised by a land use management inspector of the Mackenzie Forest Service, a federal employee responsible to the Northern Economic Development Branch. The inspector had to approve all work plans, and had the power to suspend the operation if in his view it were causing damage. In addition, a territorial game officer would be assigned to each of the two exploration crews to ensure minimum disruption of trap lines and wildlife. Finally, the trappers themselves were invited to act as inspectors and advisers to the crews. Because this would require a sacrifice of their trapping time, and 1970-71 was foreseen as a peak fox year, it was agreed that the oil companies would reimburse each trapper at the rate of \$850 per month for time spent on inspection. The Trappers' Association arranged a rotation system whereby individual trappers would go out for two weeks at a time with the crews.

In part, the inspection programme proved successful. During the winter of 1970-71, the oil companies were for the most part cooperative with the inspectors, and minor modifications to the work routine and equipment were worked out between the two parties as circumstances warranted. An inspection of seismic lines and tote roads, sponsored by the Department of Indian Affairs in the summer of 1971, showed no significant terrain damage resulting from oil exploration during the previous winter. Indeed, knowledgeable individuals involved in that inspection expressed the view that the constant monitoring during the winter had resulted in an unusually clean operation, which could usefully be emulated elsewhere.

With regard to wildlife, however, the inspection programme had limited impact, except perhaps in preventing obvious abuses. This is because, as mentioned above, the inspectors were not in a position to know which aspects of the operation were potentially harmful, although the presence of game management personnel was useful in that they were able to carry out research on the problem.

For the same reason, the presence of the trappers in an inspecting role was of little value. Other than advising on the location of traplines, there were few modifications of the operation they could recommend, since in their view the very presence of the exploration crews was a potential threat to wildlife. On the other hand, it did allow the trappers to see at first hand the routine operations of a seismic crew, of which they had known almost nothing previously. So far as many trappers were concerned, inspection merely allowed them to salvage some tangible benefit from oil exploration: \$400 for a two week stint plus whatever foxes they could trap during that time. Whether inspection fees constituted a net gain is questionable, for preliminary examination of effort and catch data for 1970-71 indicates that some men missed regular trapping trips because of their inspection tours.

The inspection programme was, then, a useful and necessary exercise with regard to terrain protection. Its utility in protecting wildlife, however, was vastly overrated by the Department of Indian Affairs, again due to a profound misunderstanding of the problem. There was a strong presumption, especially on the part of those directly responsible for oil and gas development, that if only the Eskimos could see a seismic crew in operation, somehow their fears would be allayed. Indeed it was even suggested at one point that a demonstration line be run near the village. During the Minister's visit to Sachs Harbour on 16 August, one official, admitting that he could not say for sure what the effects of exploration would be on wildlife, thought the best solution would be for the crews to start in one area and see what happened as they went along. The Minister repeatedly guaranteed that he would call an immediate halt to exploration if there were any evidence of detrimental effects to wildlife.

These assurances were of rather limited value since they were based on the assumption that adverse effects on wildlife would be marked by a sudden and dramatic event. In fact, environmental degradation rarely occurs in this manner. It is often a slow, cumulative process which becomes evident only after a long period of time. If there are adverse effects on animal populations on Banks Island, as a result of either direct stress or habitat deterioration, they are unlikely to become evident for months, or more probably years, by which time it would be far too late for preventive measures.

After one winter's work, there have been no apparent ill effects clearly attributable to seismic work, despite occasional allegations to the contrary by a few people in Sachs Harbour and Inuvik. Yet no hasty conclusions can be drawn since adverse consequences may indeed have been entrained but are not yet apparent. Only careful scientific investigation could detect such changes at an early stage. One year is not sufficient to judge the consequences, although superficial behavioural observations could be made during that time.

There is also the problem of who will assess the damage and on what basis. One doubts that if a couple of trappers had come home during the winter and said they had not gotten many foxes on their lines, a multi-million-dollar exploration programme would have come grinding to a halt.<sup>1</sup> The land use inspector may stop work temporarily if the regulations are directly contravened, but it seems most unlikely that a long-term halt would be called on the basis of imputed damage the cause of which cannot immediately be known, however real that damage may later turn out to be.

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<sup>1</sup>Or, more accurately, southern Canadians would doubt it, because there is little or nothing in their experience which suggests that the momentum of large-scale economic projects is ever affected by the resistance of individuals or small groups, or even that it should be so affected. To most southern Canadians, including the public servants, politicians and industrialists involved in the Banks Island controversy, the fact that a few innocent people get hurt by a development project is regrettable, but also unavoidable. This is an aspect of the conventional wisdom expressed in the mechanistic notion that "you can't stop progress," a notion which also serves to absolve each and all of any responsibility for the more unpleasant consequences of "progress."

The Bankslanders share neither these experiences nor these assumptions. The idea that the Minister would stop the exploration programme because it might harm fox trapping, while unthinkable to many southern Canadians, was not in the least unthinkable to the Bankslanders. In their view, the Minister had only to say the word, and his failure to do so was seen to stem from personal obstinacy or incompetence, rather than to a lack of power or because it would have been "improper."

### *Compensation*

The agreements regarding compensation are very limited in scope. They are covered in a section of the written schedule entitled "Damage to Works," and call for repair or replacement of damaged items such as traps and related equipment. This clause presumably supercedes the more vague assurances of compensation given by the oil companies earlier in the summer. In other words, if a trapper were to bring in a mangled trap which had been run over by a tractor, he would receive \$1.25. The regulations do not provide for such contingencies as a trap set being spoiled by the proximity of diesel fumes or equipment tracks, or part or all of the trap line yielding considerably less than expected. One suspects that court action would be necessary, meaning long delay for the trappers and uncertain prospects of victory. It would be difficult, but perhaps not impossible, for them to prove such damages, particularly their magnitude. They might at best receive only a token award.

### *Research*

The Department of Indian Affairs acknowledged the need for research and undertook to conduct the necessary studies. This responsibility was delegated to the Canadian Wildlife Service, although funds for this project were not immediately forthcoming. Subsequently a research programme was devised by the Territorial Game Management Service, with the Wildlife Service acting in an advisory capacity. The budget allotment for this research amounted to just over one per cent of the monies to be spent by the oil companies on seismic exploration on Banks Island.

Research was begun in the early winter and is still under way. To what extent funds would continue to be made available, and hence for how long this important research programme would be extended, was problematic at the time of writing. Divided jurisdiction and interest between the Northern Economic Development Branch, the Canadian Wildlife Service (which during the controversy was transferred from the Department of Indian Affairs to the Department of Fisheries and Forestry), and the Territorial Game Management Service makes difficult the clear and continuous administrative direction of this programme.

At present, the research programme is quite comprehensive and should yield much useful information if carried through to completion. Senior departmental officials originally appeared to have conceived of something rather less complex. The Minister conveyed the impression to the Bankslanders, at his meeting with them, that the Wildlife Service was already working on the problem and would be able to present the necessary information to him before seismic work began. In fact no serious research was conducted until exploration was already in progress.

At the same meeting, the Minister stated that although he did not know the consequences of exploration on wildlife at that time, he would be in a position to make a decision before the programme commenced. Yet no new information became available to him between 16 August and 3 October, when the seismic crews were permitted to go ahead. Although he stated that experiments could be conducted before the programme began, none were, and in any case no one appears to have known what the nature of these experiments would have been. It was stated that the decision to allow the oil companies to go ahead would depend on "tests." These tests in fact consisted of determining the depth of frost in the ground, and *nothing else*. Again, we see that the concern has been with terrain, not wildlife.

In fact, the land use inspector had neither accurate knowledge of the relationship between depth of frost and soil bearing strength, nor a clear understanding of the soil refreezing process under permafrost conditions. He was not provided with such information by the Department of Indian Affairs at any time, and appears to have been expected to base his judgements on trial and error. Yet such scientific knowledge exists, and especially in view of the fact that the department was then sponsoring its own research programme on such matters, it is unfortunate that the land use inspector was not given the benefit of this knowledge.

### **The Bankslanders' position**

The Bankslanders were well aware of these inadequacies in the regulations and assurances given them by the Department of Indian Affairs. It is not surprising, especially in view of their pre-existing attitudes toward government discussed in Chapter Two, that they felt their interest had not been well served in the dispute. They believed they were being used as guinea pigs, which was of particular concern to them in the fall of 1970, when by all indications the coming winter would provide an abundant harvest.<sup>1</sup>

The bitterness and resentment over what has happened runs deep. The Bankslanders, particularly the older members of the community, feel that the government has let them down. They recall their pioneering efforts in the early days, and a few are of the opinion that through these efforts they enhanced Canada's sovereignty over the island. The trappers note that they have regularly paid fur royalties and taxes into the public treasury, and some recall purchasing victory bonds during the war. They are proud to know they are the world's leading producers of white fox pelts, and proud that their community has always pulled its own weight. They have never been on welfare and feel they have asked the government for little.<sup>2</sup> In short, they consider themselves to have been good and useful citizens of Canada, and had assumed that in return for this the government would at least act to protect their way of life rather than destroy it. Now they are outraged that the government has suddenly cast them aside, and in their view, abrogated their basic interests in the land without a word of consultation. They wonder if they are too few for the government to care about, or more darkly, whether the government simply stands to make more money out of oil development than it does from the trappers. And the Bankslanders wonder why the government so carefully protects geese and musk oxen on the island, on behalf of what they see as outside interests, yet will do nothing to protect foxes and caribou in their own interest.

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<sup>1</sup>As it turned out, 1970-71 was indeed a peak season, and preliminary examination of effort and catch data gives no indication that the harvest was adversely affected by seismic work during that winter.

<sup>2</sup>Those who had been most opposed to the housing programme now saw an additional implication of it. The community would become beholden to the government for its shelter, and the people would no longer be able to use their own independence as a basis for resisting government encroachment, of which they saw the exploration programme as a prime example. Indeed, when the Minister visited Sachs Harbour he told the villagers that he saw housing as their most immediate need, and would ensure that it was provided. Many took this as both an insult to their own houses and a bribe to deflect their concern over the exploration programme.

On 9 July, 1970 during her royal tour of the Northwest Territories, the Queen broadcast a speech from Yellowknife, in which she said,

Life is changing very rapidly and no one can predict exactly what effect material changes are likely to have on social developments and ways of life. It is therefore most important to bear in mind that thoughtless meddling and ill-considered exploitation is just as bad as wanton destruction, and its sad effects can reach out great distances both in time as well as over the surface of the earth. This territory is your inheritance.

This message was not lost on the Bankslanders. A few weeks later on 18 August the Governor General visited Sachs Harbour during his own northern tour. He told the villagers how impressed he was with their community, adding that it was very much worth preserving, and to be proud of their heritage. They contrasted these words with those of the Minister and senior officials of the Department of Indian Affairs, whom they felt did not understand nor respect them, nor listen to what they had to say.

### **The oil companies' position**

The task of oil companies, whether public or private, is to find and produce oil, and to do so at a profit. Like other corporations in our society, they have very limited responsibilities for the external consequences and costs of their operations, so long as they fulfill their primary task. The accounting, regulation and payment of these external costs is a public responsibility; in other words, the job of the government.

Given this frame of reference (whether one agrees with it or not is another matter), Elf and Deminex behaved quite correctly. They applied for permits with the full intent of fulfilling their exploration obligations and, presumably, of complying with all existing regulations. Indeed these companies had been especially invited by the Minister of Indian Affairs himself to invest their money and efforts in the Canadian Arctic. It is understandable, then, that they were unpleasantly surprised by their reception on Banks Island, and displeased to find they would have to operate under new and more restrictive regulations.

Several individual oil company personnel expressed both sympathy with the Bankslanders' position and willingness to make some compromises. Perhaps partly through ignorance of the ecological and economic situation on Banks Island, they hoped that a compromise was indeed possible, but certainly they would not in any case voluntarily have given up their exploration programme altogether, nor forgone the rights to the island which they had obtained in good faith from the government.

Yet as has been shown, there was a conflict which was not amenable to compromise, but potentially at least called for the complete sacrifice of one interest in favour of another. The resolution of this conflict resulted in a clear victory for the oil companies, for any inconvenience and expense caused them by adhering to the land use regulations and contributing to the cost of inspection was miniscule in comparison to the total cost of the exploration programme and the potential benefits accruing to the oil industry as a result of it. The Bankslanders, on the other hand, faced the possibility of the total collapse of their way of life without any adequate alternative to replace it.

## The government's position

In the government's eyes, there had never been any serious conflict between oil and fur on Banks Island. Such, at least, was the view expressed by senior departmental officials to both the Bankslanders and, through the media, to the Canadian public. All that was needed for exploration and trapping to coexist happily was a little good will and common sense. Rational information and persuasion would soon bring the Bankslanders to see that their true interests really did not conflict with exploration, and in the meantime, the government and the oil companies would be only too happy to make "reasonable" adjustments to the programme to accommodate them.

The announcement that oil exploration had begun on 3 October was accompanied by a departmental press release noting the satisfaction of all parties concerned, and conveying the impression that the controversy had ended amicably. Ten days later the Minister responded to the summer's adverse publicity by writing the *Globe and Mail* a long letter of rebuttal to its original feature story and editorial. This letter indicated a lack of appreciation of the true state of affairs on Banks Island. A few examples are particularly interesting as they shed light on the department's attitude to the problem. For instance:

The Eskimos feared change would threaten their self-sufficient way of life. This was a natural reaction for them. When some of the Sachs Harbour trappers first used the motorized toboggan, others feared it would ruin trapping. Now they will use them and last year was one of their best years. Fear is natural. To exploit it is demeaning (Toronto *Globe and Mail*, 13 Oct. 1970).

In fact, the Bankslanders have proven themselves remarkably innovative with regard to new techniques and machinery for their traditional pursuits. They were among the first to experiment with snowmobiles for trapping. Although there is still considerable debate within the community on the relative merits of snowmobiles and dog teams, it revolves largely around their reliability and their specific application for certain purposes. No Bankslander has ever expressed the fear that snowmobiles would "ruin trapping" as such. The comparison of snowmobile movements with the constant activity of heavy machinery in their effects on wildlife is in any case ill taken—a large tractor consumes as much fuel in an hour or two as a snowmobile does in a two-week trapping trip, and snowmobiles leave little or no track in the hard, wind-driven snow surface. The implications of the paragraph are at best patronizing to the Bankslanders, since they are hardly poor benighted reactionaries with regard to technological change. These facts were brought to the attention of the Minister himself during his visit to Sachs Harbour on 16 August.

The Minister also stated that

We have secured an agreement with the oil companies which both the Trappers Association and their solicitor believe meet the needs of the community. The Sachs Harbour Association was represented by its own counsel and when the agreement had been reached, he told a northern newspaper that the Eskimos had never opposed the exploration as such, but feared for their livelihood. He expressed himself as satisfied that their interest was being protected (Toronto *Globe and Mail*, 13 Oct. 1970).

These assertions were reiterated in the House of Commons on 6 November.

In view of the preceding account in this chapter of the agreements and the circumstances under which they were concluded, little additional comment is necessary. It should be noted, however, that the consent of the Bankslanders' legal counsel was misconstrued. He was unable to make personal or telephone contact with the Bankslanders after the agreements of 3 September, and written correspondence was fraught with the difficulties of mail delays and the Bankslanders' problems with writing long and detailed letters. His agreement was based on their apparent assent to the regulations and his own admitted inability to judge the adequacy of these regulations on a scientific basis. A more correct reading of the situation was that the assent of both the Bankslanders and of their legal counsel was tentative, and that renewed action might be taken at any time if they felt the circumstances warranted it. Needless to say, the Minister's letter brought critical response from the *Globe and Mail* editorialist, the author of the feature article, and the Sachs Harbour Community Association (13 October, 6 November, 7 November).

Finally, in the House of Commons on 6 November, the Minister assured the members that there had been no request from the trappers to stop the exploration programme since its commencement, which proved, he said, that the agreements between the three parties were adequate. The absence of complaint should hardly have been surprising, since the trapping season had not yet begun. Moreover, we have already suggested in a previous section why such a conclusion was extremely premature.

It should be made clear that the above information and analysis is not meant to belittle the Minister or to suggest that he acted in other than good faith. Rather, it is meant to elucidate the operations of government in a conflict situation, show whose interest will be served and why, and relate this to the public posture of the government.

No minister can be aware of every detail of the many and complex problems for which he has been given responsibility. His statements and actions concerning such problems can only be as good as the information he has at hand, information normally provided by the public servants employed in his department. In this case, the Minister's assertions were in direct contradiction to the information contained in this report, even though this information was potentially available to him throughout the controversy. There are, however, many intervening stages between information obtained in the field and that reaching the Minister's office. This is one aspect of a problem to which we have already alluded: the fragmentation of the bureaucracy and the lack of communication and co-ordination between the various agencies. In such a situation it is almost inevitable that much information is filtered out on the way up, and that the view from the top can no longer be comprehensive.

Yet such an analysis begs the question. Senior departmental officials, who act as gathers and co-ordinators of information and viewpoints, and distill these into policy positions for the Minister, must have some rationale for the manner in which they conduct their duties. The screening of information and the weighting of viewpoints is neither accidental nor arbitrary. In their deliberations these officials must be responsive to a number of pressures and influences. These would include their own career backgrounds and experiences, their sensitivity to public sentiment and reaction, and perhaps especially that of powerful interest groups, as well as cabinet directives on broad policy lines. The Minister himself is also responsive to these pressures, particularly the more political ones.

At the beginning of this chapter, the broad objectives of the Department of Indian Affairs were outlined, as well as the way in which oil development in the North was related to these. It has been shown that there was a direct conflict of interest on Banks Island. This conflict exemplifies the potential for contradiction between the various departmental objectives, and its resolution suggests the actual priority of these objectives.

One may now examine how oil exploration on Banks Island conforms to these objectives. With the reservations noted at the beginning of this chapter, it could be argued that such activity would enhance Canadian sovereignty in the North, and constitute viable economic development which would contribute to the national economy. It should be noted, however, that the fur economy on Banks Island also fulfilled these objectives. Certainly oil development would make a greater contribution to the national economy than fur trapping. That Canadian sovereignty would be more enhanced by oil exploration than fur trapping, however, rests on the assumption that sovereignty is a function of land use intensity as measured by monetary investment and return. Such an assumption would not appear to have a sound basis in international law.

With regard to the standard of living and quality of life of northern residents, it has been shown that oil exploration will reduce rather than improve these for the Bankslanders, at least during the foreseeable future. Moreover, such activity is quite clearly not "compatible with their own preference and aspirations." It is also evident that rather than maintaining or enhancing the northern environment, oil exploration poses a potential threat to it.

The fur economy of Banks Island has done a reasonably good job of meeting all four of the department's major objectives. Yet the department was prepared to risk destroying it in favour of a resource activity which might provide an advance toward only one of these four objectives, and possibly negate two of the others. The critical questions arising from the Banks Island case are why the government did not acknowledge the depth of the conflict (at least publicly), and why this conflict was ultimately resolved in favour of an activity largely at variance with announced government objectives.

Comprehensive answers to these questions would require a treatise on Canadian society and government far beyond the scope of this report. Yet a few salient points stand out. Northern development has been a significant public goal in Canada, especially during the last two or three decades. Under our political and economic system this great task has been delegated chiefly to government and to large resource development corporations. More recently, the public has become conscious of the need to protect both the northern environment and welfare of native northerners. Most Canadians have wanted to serve all these interests, and most have believed it possible to do so.

Recent events, of which the Banksland controversy is one, have raised doubts that all these goals can be served simultaneously. Those who have committed so much time, energy and money to a development programme naturally do not like to find obstacles suddenly appearing in mid-course. A great and complex plan, once set in motion, has too much momentum to be stopped by every snag. It is a natural reaction, under such circumstances, to discount the importance of these obstacles, and to override them if they do not seem too large.

The Department of Indian Affairs has suddenly found itself in a very awkward situation. It is on the one hand responsible for northern economic development, and on the other for the welfare of indigenous peoples. It had on the one hand invited foreign oil companies to explore for oil in the Arctic, and on the other had not only granted exclusive rights to the fur resources of Banks Island to the local inhabitants but was also responsible for the sound management of these resources. Suddenly the department was forced to arbitrate between the interests of the oil companies and those of the Bankslanders.

In this situation the trappers found themselves at an enormous disadvantage relative to the oil companies. The companies, armed with legal and technical experts and vast amounts of money, are well versed in the arts of lobbying and persuasion. They are, moreover, well represented in government, by people who have worked in industry, who understand its interests, who move in the same world and share the same basic purposes in life as executives, lawyers, engineers and technicians. The commonality of experience, values and aspirations between government and industry personnel is great. The fact that the government is nominally regulating the activities of the oil companies creates a gulf, to be sure, but one in no way as vast as that between the government and the trappers. For the trappers are quite unrepresented in government. Their way of life is considered alien and primitive, and even though government personnel responsible for their welfare may be sincere and competent, most have little understanding or empathy with their needs and problems. Real communication between the two parties is almost impossible. That the oil companies should be the obvious victors in such a contest is in no way the result of a conspiracy or of evil doing. It is a natural consequence of the existing system. It nonetheless raises serious questions as to how effectively one government department can wear two hats. It may be inevitable that responsibility for native welfare will be subordinated to responsibility for northern development, if the two are in conflict.

Yet this does not provide a full explanation of the government's behaviour during the crisis. It was suggested earlier than upon discovering conflicts between objectives, the government could respond in several ways. One would be to assume that one party did not understand what was involved, and the solution would therefore be to explain the programme more clearly. The Banksland controversy was referred to many times by the government as merely a case of misunderstanding. That may have been so on the part of the government, for the responsible officials either could not or would not understand the seriousness of the Bankslanders' objections. The Bankslanders, however, understood the problem only too clearly. Improved consultation was indeed necessary, but only in the sense that the government should have listened to the Bankslanders. The existence of a fundamental conflict could not be wished away by any amount of explanation, persuasion and showing of colour films by the department.

Consultation should have occurred in the Banksland case, and should occur in future in others like it, but its function must be clearly understood. Consultation is not simply a process whereby one party informs another of its intentions. If a government department is responsible to two or more clients, it is not the government's function to prevail on behalf of only one of them. It should be an arbiter between the disputants in the sense that it must hear all relevant arguments, and then decide which course of

action is most consistent with its stated, and presumably popularly supported, objectives. Consultation is the means whereby these views can be presented, and in the case of native northerners, the government has the special obligation to ensure that their views are put forward with the same power and cogency which large corporations can bring to bear. If native groups or communities require legal, technical or organizational aid, these should be welcomed and assisted by the government, not avoided or subverted.

If the government realizes that opposing interests may be irreconcilable, which in the case of non-renewable versus renewable resource exploitation should now be clear, it must then decide which of its stated objectives will be served and which will be sacrificed. The resolution of the Banks Island case suggests that the government has decided that the welfare of native northerners and the northern environment are to be sacrificed in favour of large-scale economic development for the benefit of southern Canadians and foreign corporations.

This conclusion is supported by similar and more recent events. Early in 1971, two geophysical contractors notified the department of their intention to conduct gravity surveys on Banks Island the following summer, one survey to involve the use of ground vehicles, the other, helicopters. Modifications, at least partly in accord with the September agreements, were recommended to the companies. Yet news of these plans did not reach the Bankslanders until late May, and then only through independent channels, despite the fact that one survey party was already on the island. The department had, in correspondence with the companies, noted the need for local consultation, but it was not until a telegram from the Bankslanders was received by the Minister that such consultation was hastily arranged. The problem has since been resolved to the satisfaction of the Bankslanders, although they perhaps rightly sense that with each new exploratory venture they will be asked to acquiesce to new terms far beyond those originally agreed to in September 1970.

Another significant development has been the marine seismic explorations off Southampton Island in Hudson Bay. The Southampton Islanders, like the Bankslanders, rely on local fur and food resources for much of their livelihood. In recent months, they have vigorously protested the planned programme of marine seismic work because they are afraid that underwater detonations will harm the seals and walrus on which they are so dependent. The Minister of Indian Affairs, in a letter to the residents of Coral Harbour, declined to halt the programme because "to stop would be a mere postponement," and advised the people to accept "its inevitability with the determination that it shall be controlled and that the people of Southampton Island shall have a direct say in how it shall be done" (*Toronto Globe and Mail*, 6 Aug. 1971).

If stopping exploration is merely a postponement, one may reasonably infer that no matter how adverse the effects of it are shown to be on marine life, oil exploration will proceed. Perhaps this is why the wildlife research programme on Banks Island has received such tenuous support. The exhortation to Eskimos to accept the inevitability of exploration suggests that the stated departmental objective of raising living standards and the quality of life in the North in accordance with local preference and aspirations applies only so long as these preferences and aspirations coincide with those of the government.

It appears, then, that the government has already placed highest priority on oil and gas development in the North, and that local interests or the maintenance of the environment are to be sacrificed when they conflict with the first objective. If this is indeed government policy, it should be clearly stated and explained. To continue maintaining that there is no conflict and that all interests may be served simultaneously is to perpetrate a fraud on northerners and all other Canadians.

### **The role of the public**

The Banks Island controversy generated wide attention in the press and radio, and the Minister of Indian Affairs received many letters from private citizens. Both the citizens and the media were nearly unanimous in siding with the Bankslanders. While neither were always well informed of the facts, they did recognize the fundamental issues involved.

There can be no question that the government responded to this pressure. Most of the concessions the Bankslanders obtained in regard to regulation and inspection of the exploration programme were gained not through direct representation to the government or the oil companies, but through legal and political protest and the resulting public attention and sympathy.

Since the government is indeed responsive to public pressure one can only conjecture what would have been the result if the magnitude of this pressure had been much greater than it was. Hence, to the degree that there is an interplay between the government and the public and, to the degree that the government not only leads but responds to public opinion, responsibility for the resolution of the Banksland controversy and others like it lies not only with the government but with the public.

The question has been asked by some, "Why should a hundred people on Banks Island stand in the way of twenty million Canadians?" Perhaps the real question is whether the majority of Canadians truly feel their need for the immediate development of oil and gas resources in the Arctic justifies the potential damage to both the northern environment and the interests of those who rely on it for a living. Nor can the question of aboriginal title to the land be avoided, for growing numbers of native northerners are of the view that recognition of their title to the land is critical if they are to influence the course of northern development, and derive benefit from it. These matters have not been fully debated and resolved. The public must therefore understand the implications of northern development, see the potential conflicts and decide where their true interests lie. These are not simply economic questions but moral and political ones as well. On their answers hinges the quality of life which Canada builds for all its citizens, in the north and in the south. Inevitably, the Bankslanders, and ultimately all northerners, depend on the public's attitude to these questions, for without outside support, they will not likely alter the course of northern development in any beneficial way.

So we return to our theme of the subordination of the hinterland to the metropolis. Who will benefit from northern development, and who will dictate the course of this development? Will it be Dallas, Ottawa and Calgary, or Sachs Harbour, Rankin Inlet and Frobisher Bay? There are no "scientific" answers to these questions. We can not rely solely on the advice of experts. The allocation and use of power is for all to decide. In the short term it is easy to ignore the interests of a few. Yet the harvest of such a policy can only be alienation and bitterness, from which neither northerners nor southerners can benefit.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the first two volumes of this report, the genesis of the trapping community at Sachs Harbour was examined, as well as its ecology, technology and economy. A general analysis was presented of the current status of the fur industry, and particularly the white fox industry. Then, viewing Banks Island as the ultimate frontier of trapping in the Western Arctic, the spatial pattern of settlement and resource exploitation there was analyzed, as well as the process of adaptation by the settlers to this new environment. By means of participant observation and interviews, detailed data were obtained on investment of time and money by the trappers in their various economic activities. These data provided the basis for correlating effort inputs with trapping success, which in turn enabled the calculation of tentative predictor equations for trapping success applicable to other areas having similar levels of fox abundance. Quantitative analysis of seal, caribou, polar bear and other types of hunting showed the manner in which these activities are integrated with trapping into a total resource system. Finally, methods were presented for the evaluation of production costs of fur pelts and animal foods, as well as the evaluation of income in kind.

In this volume, the community of Sachs Harbour was analyzed, first from the perspective of the mid-1960s, and subsequently in the light of more recent developments. The effects of the general extension of government administration and services to Sachs Harbour were examined, and finally the oil exploration controversy of 1970, and its implications for both the community and the North as a whole, were discussed.

In concluding this discussion of the trapping *resource system* on Banks Island, one asks whether it meets the three criteria posed by Firey:<sup>1</sup> ecologic possibility, economic gainfulness and social adoptability. It is also necessary to show whether the conditions and tendencies leading to stability or instability are internal or external to the system, and whether they are the result of historical accident or of more enduring forces. In answering these questions one seeks to discover not only the future of the Banks Island resource system, but also whether this system as a generic type can be transplanted or instituted elsewhere.

#### **The ecological basis of trapping**

From an ecological viewpoint, the trapping and hunting system on Banks Island appears to be internally stable. Although the arctic fox is very mobile, there appears to be a distinct Banks Island population, or at least a regional one which is exploited largely if not exclusively by Sachs Harbour trappers. There is no evidence that any of the major economic species are being or have been overharvested during the 40 years of settlement, since there have been no long-term declines in productivity per man or per unit of effort.

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<sup>1</sup>Previously discussed in the introduction to Volume One.

Figure 4.1 shows the various territories required to support the present level of population at its current economic standard. Fox trapping requires the largest amount of territory and the area available for this pursuit constitutes the real limit on the number of trappers the island can support. Most of the best trapping grounds are now being used, although a few individuals wishing to exploit the north central part of the island could probably do so without seriously prejudicing the success of Sachs-based trappers. The likelihood of anyone actually setting up a winter trapping camp in that area is small, in view of the current attractions of settlement life. The number of trappers operating out of Sachs Harbour appears to be optimal, although possibly a few more could be accommodated without detriment to either the resource base or individual productivity. Thus there does not appear to be any internal threat to the equilibrium of the Banks Island ecosystem.

The introduction of new resource harvesting technology could, however, upset the present ecological balance. The widespread introduction of snowmobiles, for example, has opened the possibility of faster and hence more frequent trapping trips. In peak years, greater frequency of trap checks would both increase productivity and reduce losses. In poorer years, the snowmobile could enable men to run longer lines, especially in spring, to take advantage of hitherto unexploited country. In the coldest and often least productive months of January and February, the men could make their monthly trips in perhaps a week instead of two weeks, and have more leisure time at home. Increased trapping effort could lead to overharvesting. Present evidence, however, suggests that the Bankslanders are generally using the snowmobile to give themselves more leisure time than to increase their trapping effort<sup>1</sup>, and unless fox prices fall drastically, this should continue to be the case.

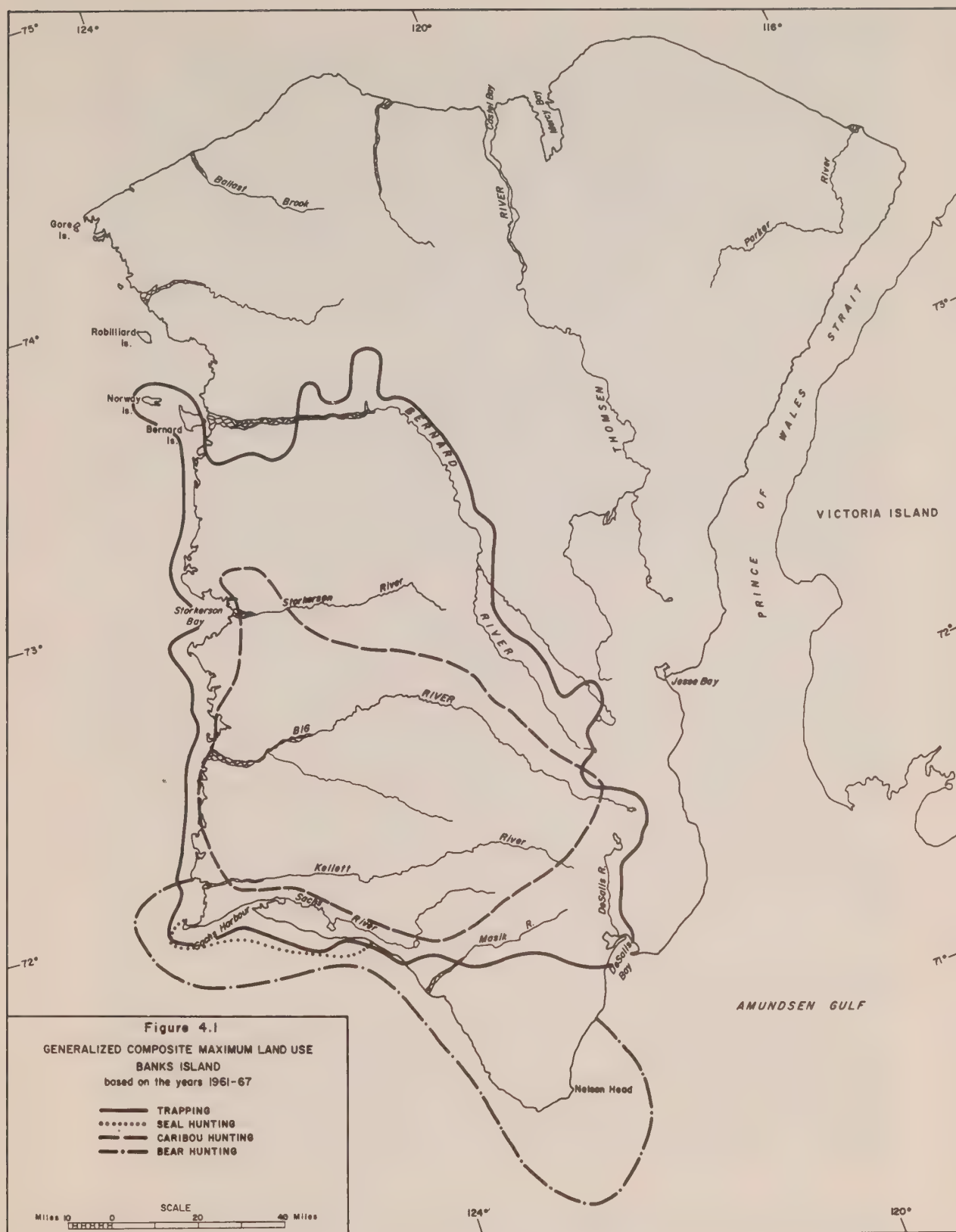
The impingement of other resource systems, however, whether centred on Banks Island or elsewhere, may affect the ecological stability of Banks Island. Two faunal resources are not wholly indigenous to the island: seals and migratory birds. Some migratory birds have their wintering grounds in the United States endangered by urbanization or pollution, although they are not essential economic species to the Bankslanders.

Plans for the transport of crude oil by supertankers or other means through the Northwest Passage raise the possibility of pollution of Banks Island's coasts and adjacent waters, an obvious threat to the natural resource base. Banks Island itself is currently being explored for oil and gas. This could have serious adverse ecological effects, as outlined in Chapter Three, although this cannot be predicted with any certainty.

The ecological conditions which support the Banks Island trapping system are not unique. Fur harvests over the last several decades indicate that a broad belt of land sweeping eastward from Banks Island through Victoria and King William islands, the northeastern Mackenzie District, and most of the Keewatin District, to Southampton Island and Foxe Peninsula may support arctic foxes at a similar level of abundance as Banks Island itself. Caribou are available in much of this region, as are seals in the coastal areas. In other parts of the circumpolar world, the Soviet North in particular has large areas which offer a similar ecological basis for such a trapping system.

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<sup>1</sup>See Usher, 1970b.



## **The economic basis of trapping**

Trapping on Banks Island has unquestionably been economically gainful. It has brought good returns on investment and yielded high individual incomes. There is no opportunity cost in trapping, for adults at least, since any jobs which might be opened to them on retraining would not bring them a higher standard of living. This success has resulted from a strong motivation toward economic gain and the social legitimacy of trapping as a means to this end, as well as from comparatively high levels of technology, organization, skill and capitalization. The Sachs Harbour economy exhibits reasonably long-term stability, but is vulnerable in several respects. This is partly because the local economy has virtually no internal dynamic—in the absence of a supra-family economic structure or flow of money or goods, the trappers' vital economic links go not to each other but to the outside.

The Sachs Harbour economy, like all fur-based economies, is vulnerable due to price instability (although not to instability of supply, since over the cycle, this is reasonably constant). At present, the threat is not so much one of changing fashion, but of an increasingly short supply of foxes in a market where these pelts are used for moderately priced trim rather than on their own as luxury furs. The increasing share of the market held by Sachs Harbour trappers may not be to their advantage if the total supply dwindles to the point where manufacturers will seek substitute furs. The localization of the source of white foxes will also intensify the cyclic nature of their supply, and hence the short term instability of their price. The economic welfare of the Bankslanders may to some extent depend on the continued productivity of trappers elsewhere.

Like so many primary producers in Canada, the Bankslanders sell on an unprotected, international market and buy in a protected, national one, but their problem is compounded by a lack of even rudimentary guarantees or insurance. The present system of credit and marketing is advantageous to the Bankslanders, and, from a producer's point of view, is probably the most satisfactory one yet evolved in the history of northern Canadian trapping. It is none the less vulnerable since it is extremely individualistic and depends largely on personal reputation and acquaintance.

In fact, the owners of the three chief businesses with which the Bankslanders deal, in Sachs Harbour, Inuvik and Edmonton, are all nearing the end of their careers. Whether these businesses will continue, and if they do, whether the Bankslanders will be able to maintain such advantageous trading arrangements, is questionable. New systems of marketing, such as the territorial government's Trappers Advance Programme or the establishment of a local cooperative store, may have to fill the breach. The success of such changes cannot be predicted.

In any case, there is very little security in trapping because no matter how well a man does, the realizable gain on his assets is relatively small, and most forms of public or private insurance such as unemployment benefits, crop insurance, or sickness benefits are either not available or would be prohibitively costly. Economic security remains a family or community matter rather than a public or national one. In view of the small number of people involved, it seems unlikely that this situation will change.

Yet the Bankslanders have survived the economic vicissitudes of the last 40 years, and only during the crisis of 1948-51 did white fox trapping lose its economic viability for them. The circumstances which created that situation—inability to trap in all years,

large outstanding debts and extremely low fur prices—seem unlikely to occur in combination in the foreseeable future. Most trappers feel they could continue to make a living even if fox prices averaged as low as \$10.00 per pelt. Such judgements are bound to be affected by the standard of living in other communities and other walks of life, however, since one's sense of deprivation is measured on a relative, not an absolute, scale. The rise in personal income on the national level over the last 40 years has been contrasted with the relatively unchanged situation in fur incomes. The Bankslanders cannot rely on a rising market to increase their incomes: this can only come through improved productivity and reduced overheads.

Under present circumstances, it is quite clear that white-fox trapping can be the basis of an economically rewarding way of life. It can provide individual incomes far greater than those presently obtained by most white fox trappers, and which also exceed earnings from most local unskilled or semi-skilled wage positions. Much of Banks Island's uniqueness in this respect can be traced to particular historical events or circumstances, and admittedly the Bankslanders' way of life was nurtured in an era when trapping was the rule all across the North. However, since the ecological basis of the Banksland trapping system is widespread, increased capitalization and improved marketing and credit facilities could greatly augment total Canadian white-fox production, and many trappers in other areas could realize good incomes from this industry. There is nothing about either the technology or economic organization of trapping on Banks Island that cannot be reproduced elsewhere.

The fact is that trapping is not an inherently outmoded economic pursuit. As has been the case among farmers and fishermen, there have been too many trappers employing too little capital and technology and too few skills. Just as in these other industries however, there are modern and profitable methods which can be introduced. So long as the basic resource is desired by society and a demonstrably satisfactory livelihood can be gained by harvesting it, it is far preferable to seek a rationalization of the industry than its abandonment. As has been shown on Banks Island, such things as a good stock of capital equipment, skill and hard work on the trail, and the judicious use of aircraft can bring the white fox trapper a good income. In addition, further improvements are being introduced, particularly the snowmobile, which if properly used could make trapping both easier and more profitable.

### **The social and cultural basis of trapping**

Trapping has been the basis of a way of life both socially and psychologically satisfying to the Bankslanders. Many of the reasons people give for coming to Banks Island and for remaining there express ideals about social as well as economic life. The external forces affecting this "socially adoptable" system are extremely important. Community social life, although exhibiting a distinct internal dynamic, is in many respects simply a variant of that characteristic of the Western Arctic as a whole. To the degree that Sachs Harbour people identify with this larger region and have links with people and institutions in its other communities, they are also affected by the social forces acting within and upon it.

It has already been shown how this specialized trapping community arose during a particular historical stage in the development of a unique fur-trade region. Many of the

values and goals which made the Bankslanders' way of life socially adoptable were peculiar to that era and place, and are nonexistent among (or irrelevant to) a younger generation which might otherwise have followed the same road. The fidelity which people over thirty still claim to the "old ways" is not shared by younger people, on whom the impact of the metropolis, through education, the media, and Inuvik itself, has been profound. There is no question that the adult trappers wish to maintain their way of life on Banks Island, but their children are unlikely to continue it.

The Banksland trapping system is unique because it originally arose in an area in which, although it was economically gainful and socially adoptable, it was ecologically unstable. Only through its transplantation to Banks Island could all three conditions be met and the system survive and develop. Although it was ecologically sustainable and economically feasible in many other parts of the Arctic, nowhere else did the sociological prerequisites exist. To the east, the Eskimos were never as acculturated and commercially oriented as the western people. Trapping never evolved into a modern way of life in the Central or Eastern Arctic. It became an unsatisfactory means of existence there not because the resource disappeared, but because the meagre returns gained through primitive, undercapitalized trapping methods no longer met the needs of the people. With the rise of both population and expectations in the North, the fur resource can no longer be the sole basis of the economy, although there is a sound ecological and technological basis for this resource to employ a moderate number of people at a good standard of living all across the Arctic. The likelihood of such a development, however, is small.

The trends in government planning in the North have already been alluded to in Volume One, Chapter One. The revitalization of the trapping industry does not enter into these plans. Less easy to document is the widespread negative image from which trapping suffers in much of the North today, even among adults. Trapping has been explicitly and implicitly discouraged in many ways all across the North. Since the mid-1950s, government authorities have consistently tried to find alternative sources of income for Eskimos; to wean them from trapping and hunting rather than improving the methods and organization of these pursuits. These efforts have included the development of commercial fisheries, garment manufacturing, carving, non-renewable resources, construction and services. Since 1964, when Jenness recommended Eskimo emigration to the south as a solution to northern unemployment and poverty (1964:174 ff.), the Department of Indian Affairs has increasingly encouraged greater mobility in the Eskimo labour force.

These endeavours have been necessary and beneficial but they were never coupled with serious attempts to revitalize the land-based way of life. The economic and social disparity which has grown up between what is left of this old life and the new way of life of the increasingly numerous and powerful white transients in the North, has engendered a crisis of self-confidence and purpose among many Eskimo people. To them, trapping symbolizes all that is "inferior" and "inadequate" about the old way of life and indeed about their very identity. Trapping is therefore rejected along with all the other old ways which now manifestly fail to bring either money or happiness.

Father Brown has suggested that trapping in the N.W.T. be reopened to whites, whose diligence would provide a positive example to native trappers, and that trapper

education be made an integral part of the school system (1966:43). There is indeed evidence that trapping has become a native-identified occupation, to be looked down on by both whites and natives alike. Yet the effectiveness of the white trapper as a behavioural model must be questioned, since in most of the areas inhabited by white trappers before World War Two neither excellence nor commitment to trapping ever became widespread among the native people. Furthermore, with the great rise in income since the Depression in most industrial and agricultural pursuits relative to fur prices, one would hardly expect a great influx of white trappers in response to the general availability of trapping permits.

The inclusion of trapping in the school curriculum can make little headway against the overwhelmingly metropolitan values which education and the media express just as surely in the North as anywhere else. Education no longer consists of learning the "Three R's" so an individual may be better equipped for his chosen profession, but is rather a means of inculcating the values of a technologically sophisticated urban society and of developing people to fill the roles that such a society requires. The expression of local values and the fulfillment of local interests are increasingly difficult in modern North American society, and await profound social changes beyond the scope of the present discussion.

Not only do these broad trends affect the North as a whole, but individual communities are constantly in danger of disruption by economic activity outside, or by the decisions of large bureaucratic organizations, who act in the name not of local good but of national or corporate interests. A decision to build a defence base, to make a harbour, to build a pipeline, to enlarge the Mounted Police barracks or the school, or to establish a mission, can profoundly affect a small community despite the lack of any consultation with its inhabitants, let alone their permission. These things can overwhelm a once viable way of life, even unintentionally. Sometimes the effect is slow and cumulative, at other times sudden, but it is just as profound in either case. Just such events now threaten the continued existence of Sachs Harbour itself.

Thus, there is an ecological and economic basis for an expansion of white-fox trapping on the Banksland model, but external social ideas, decisions and institutions presently militate against such a development. Thus it is evident that resource-use plans must be socially adoptable as well as ecologically possible and economically gainful if they are to succeed. Similarly, one cannot understand the dynamics of a particular pattern of resource use without investigating all three aspects of it. Resource planning cannot proceed on the assumption that only one or two of these aspects are relevant, and others may safely be ignored. Nor can regional resource planning be based on the analysis of local conditions alone. The relations with other regions, and in particular with the metropolis, must also be understood.

The future of Sachs Harbour as a viable community has become uncertain. Its future is clouded not by inherent deficiencies of resources, capital, people or imagination, but by forces beyond its horizons and beyond its control. Sachs Harbour is now a lone trapping community in a land in transition and doubt, and its independence, resourcefulness and well-being stand out like a beacon in the night. If human welfare consists of maximizing choice and opportunity, then it is indeed unfortunate that economic decisions made far away, or that government decrees, unthinking in their generality, should extinguish that beacon.

## Recommendations

The recommendations based on the three volumes of this report deal with three principal areas of consideration in the order in which they were discussed: first, the fur economy, second, community autonomy and control, and third, the resolution of conflicts between renewable and non-renewable resource development. These areas of consideration are closely interrelated, and hence the implementation of any one set of recommendations will have little effect if no action is taken on the others.

### *1. The fur economy*

The recommendations which follow are based on the premise already elaborated in this report: that fur trapping and its related activities can make a significant contribution to the economic and social well-being of native northerners. The Banks Island experience suggests that there is a sound ecologic and economic basis for the re-establishment of the fur industry in other parts of the North. Indeed, the continued well-being of the Banks Island fur economy depends in part on the maintenance of a viable white-fox industry elsewhere.

Although their potential value is small in comparison with some other resources, furs remain the most ubiquitous resource in the North, and hence the one most readily accessible to the largest number of people as they are presently distributed. In the main, the fur resources of the Northwest Territories are under-exploited, and they could make a much greater contribution to the northern economy than they do now. Such expansion would provide more opportunities for native people. For example, those who do not wish to enter the new industrial, construction, or administrative sectors of the economy would then have the choice of maintaining a way of life based on the exploitation of traditional resources by modern methods. The near total reliance in government planning on the new economic sectors, and the consequent neglect of the fur industry, has rendered the latter option virtually untenable for most northerners at present.

The need for capital and for improved technology and organization in the fur industry is great, but relative to other industrial ventures, the investment required to create individual jobs is small. Government should therefore:

1. Examine the possibilities of re-establishing the fur industry in the North, and develop plans for maximizing the industry's contribution to the northern economy;
2. Encourage and conduct increased research on population levels and migration patterns of northern fur-bearing animals, particularly the arctic fox, and devise appropriate regional strategies for maximizing the harvest;
3. Give greater encouragement to existing trappers' organizations, and help them to expand their roles in game management and the financing of trapping operations, in close consultation with these organizations at every stage;

4. Give greater encouragement to willing and competent trappers to expand their operations on a more modern basis, and in particular provide them with the necessary capital and equipment through loans;
5. Encourage the diffusion of expert trapping knowledge, possibly on an exchange basis between individual trappers from different communities;
6. Examine the problem of simultaneously maximizing credit availability and marketing flexibility;
7. Give greater attention to promoting wild furs at national and international levels, and in particular combat the adverse publicity surrounding the trapping of wild fur-bearers.

Elaborate price support or marketing systems are probably not necessary at this time. More important is the development of backward and forward economic linkages to enhance industrial stabilization. Modern trapping as a viable industry still depends on associated hunting activities. These activities provide income in kind which is an important component of total income, and they are also complementary activities in terms of time allocation and expenditure. They constitute backward linkages, and along with such others as the repair of equipment and the making of pelt stretchers, are best left in the hands of individual trappers and excluded from the cash economy. The chief consideration here is probably the maintenance of the viability of existing arrangements. Other backward linkages such as the manufacture of traps and snowmobiles cannot feasibly be established in the North at this time.

Forward linkages such as tanning and fur-garment manufacturing should, however, be given greater attention, despite the difficulties which similar ventures have encountered in the past. Such developments serve not only to increase the availability of jobs and the stability of income, but also could increase the local circulation of money and provide savings and investment opportunities for local capital. One of the weaknesses of the Sachs Harbour economy, and of other similar native economies, is the lack of community financial institutions beyond the family level which allow the local retention and control of savings and profits.

Relaxation of present restrictions (now based largely on ethnic status) on access to the fur resource might be of marginal benefit in stimulating production. Such a move would be unacceptable to native northerners, however, until the larger issue of land rights is resolved to their satisfaction.

Given the social obstacles to re-establishing the fur industry in the North which have already been described, the effectiveness of any or all of the above specific recommendations hinges on the acceptance of the more general ones which follow.

## *2. Community autonomy and control*

The evidence given in this report suggests that while the extension of many government and private services to the North has been beneficial, the overwhelming control and direction of these by outside personnel and institutions can lead to a serious break-

down of local autonomy and initiative at both the individual and community level. The process is already far advanced, even in relatively isolated communities such as Sachs Harbour, and the problem is now to try to reverse it and overcome its detrimental effects. At Sachs Harbour, and probably elsewhere as well, the government has much to overcome in re-establishing a healthy working relationship with native northerners. The following recommendations should be of assistance in this task.

1. The identification of needs and the provision of services at the individual and community level should be left largely to local initiative. The government should provide technical expertise and cash assistance, within limits determined jointly by it and the community. The central design, imposition and implementation of large-scale, comprehensive programmes should be de-emphasized. Earlier attempts by government to identify specific local conditions and requirements, through the area survey investigations for example, have not been effectively translated into the administration of its programmes.
2. Existing government programmes must be administered with much greater flexibility at the local level. This can be done through expanded consultation with individual communities, but more particularly through placing much greater *control* of programmes in local hands.
3. Specifically, in communities such as Sachs Harbour where needs are clearly different from those of other Arctic settlements, the rental housing programme should be abandoned in favour of an ownership plan, with greater emphasis on technical advice and loan assistance to improve existing dwellings. Fuel and services should be subsidized without reference to the provision of housing. The latter recommendation may have broad applicability throughout the North.
4. The provision of housing for outsider personnel should be made with a view to minimizing or eliminating the differentiation between native and white sectors of the community.
5. Native northerners should take every advantage of the territorial hamlet ordinance to prevent unwanted outside agencies from establishing in their communities.
6. Government agencies should not be permitted to create community service positions or appoint personnel to them in small settlements without consultation with the permanent inhabitants.

### *3. Non-renewable resource development*

The potential for conflict between present land-based activities, and oil or mineral exploration and development must be fully recognized. If non-renewable resource development, and particularly oil development, is to be accepted by native northerners and provide real benefit to them, the following considerations must be borne in mind.

1. The legitimate interest of native people in their land and resources must be fully recognized.

2. All possible harmful effects of oil and mineral development on the environment, and particularly on wildlife resources, must be fully investigated *in advance of* actual development work. In some instances it may be impossible to determine the effects of development work without actually conducting such work. In such cases, development should be restricted to areas where renewable resources are not being exploited, and the necessary research should be conducted simultaneously. If it can then be demonstrated to native people that oil or mineral development has no significant harmful effects on wildlife, they will be much more likely to welcome such activity. It should be recognized and accepted that such investigations may take several years. The cost of these investigations may perhaps legitimately be charged to oil and mineral companies. The research itself, however, must be conducted by disinterested parties, and made public so that it can be evaluated by any individual or group. Government cannot prejudge the outcome of such research, and must be prepared to adjust development plans on the basis of the research results. Where there are legitimate grounds for supposing that oil or mineral development may jeopardize the ecological basis of existing resource use patterns, the onus of proof must lie with the developers that damage will not occur, rather than with those already engaged in renewable resource harvesting to prove that their own interests will be harmed.

3. Government (and industry) concepts of "consultation" must be completely revised. The Banks Island controversy, and other similar ones, suggest that for government, "consultation" now means merely informing people of pre-existing plans and suggesting ways in which they should adapt to them. This is often accompanied by attempts to inform and educate which, because they so obviously represent a limited viewpoint, appear as propaganda campaigns. Such "consultation" is becoming increasingly unacceptable to native northerners. It should be replaced by *negotiation*, in which interest groups may bargain as equals and have equal access to information as well as to technical and negotiating expertise. Local interests must be fully represented by the agents of their choice.

Therefore there should be a moratorium on oil and mineral development in all areas utilized by native peoples until these conditions are met. Since it is primarily government which has failed to meet these conditions, government must bear full responsibility for the resulting delays and inconveniences to other parties. It is unacceptable to native people that they should be forced to pay for previous government negligence with their own livelihoods and communities.

#### *Concluding remarks*

Recommendations, and indeed existing programmes, will fail in their intent if they are not implemented in spirit as well as in letter. One may argue that government, on the basis of stated policy, is already committed to essentially the same goals and even many of the same methods recommended above. The case of Banks Island suggests that, on the contrary, government is committed to very different goals and methods. It is the burden of this report that the present direction of government policy is not necessarily due to personal malice, but can be explained by the metropolis-hinterland relationship, and particularly by the bureaucratic manifestations of that relationship. The spirit of these

recommendations is that power be decentralized to the local level so that northerners may exercise as much control as possible over their own destinies. Northerners cannot rely on a single government department with conflicting responsibilities to act consistently in their best interests.

There is a growing feeling among native northerners that the settlement of native or aboriginal land claims is essential if they are to derive justice from northern development. The federal government's position is that northerners will be better served if they are given full opportunity to participate in the development of their land. If the recommendations outlined above are implemented, then, and perhaps only then, will native people truly feel a sense of participation, of pride, and of hope for themselves and their society. In that event they may well feel they have achieved justice and fair treatment without the prerequisite of a land-claims settlement.

It has also been demonstrated in this report that the existing metropolis-hinterland relationship in Canada has been detrimental to the Bankslanders, and by extension, detrimental to many northern communities. Responsible individuals in the metropolis can recognize these iniquities, and through their institutions act to correct them in co-operation with the people of the hinterland. If not, those in the hinterland have the choice of sullen resignation or of acting in self-defence with whatever strength they can muster.

**APPENDIX A**

**DOCUMENTS**



**Appeal for a local day school submitted by the  
Sachs Harbour Community Association, 26 December 1966**

Copies of the following letter were sent to government officials in the Northwest Territories and in Ottawa, as well as to elected territorial and federal legislators. The letter was signed by the four senior officers of the community association.

We the people of Sachs Harbour have a matter which we wish to bring to the attention of our elected representatives and the officials responsible for the administration of our district. For several years we have requested that a school be built here so that our children may receive their education in their own community, but so far, nothing has been done. We are now asking that immediate action be taken to erect a two room federal day school here in the summer of 1967 to accommodate the 24 children presently in grades 1 to 6 now boarded in Inuvik hostels.

We believe that such a school is more than justified for the following reasons:

1. The number of children in grades 1 to 6 is steadily increasing and the school would be assured of at least 30 pupils for several years to come. This is quite sufficient for two classrooms.

2. According to the background documents of the Carrothers Commission report, ours is the only community in the NWT, with the exception of Repulse Bay, for which no school has been constructed. There are about 15 communities of our size or smaller with schools in the NWT, while we are without one. Our population is about 100; we understand that such places as Grise Fjord with 70 people, Jean Marie River with 44, Lake Harbour with 90, Nahanni Butte with 76, Padloping with 55, and Reindeer Station with 60, all have one room schools, while Gjoa Haven with 98, Resolute Bay with 122 and Whale Cove with 130 people all have two room schools. We notice also in the Education Division Annual Report for 1964-65, that of the 64 schools operated by the Division, 21 have an enrollment of 30 pupils or less. We fail to see why our community should be the only one left out.

3. We are very anxious to keep our children at home at least during the early grades. They leave us now at the ages of six or seven, to spend ten months of the year without a break at the hostels in Inuvik. The departure of the school plane is an unhappy time for us and our children. After a few years of hostel life our children come home in the summers as though they were visitors or strangers; as if they were no longer ours. They do not know our language or our culture or our way of life. We are not demanding that our children must keep to our ways, but only that they do not reject and scorn it. We want our children to get good educations, but at the same time wish that they be able to make a choice between trapping and going on to high school and getting wage work. They are no more able to make this choice by spending their childhood years in Inuvik than they would be if they never went to school at all. Now, if we want our children to become trappers we have to keep them out of school, but we would rather that they could learn both ways at once. Our children are the most precious gifts we have. We are losing them now and we do not want this. Our is a healthy community and we firmly believe that our children will grow up with better and more firmly rooted values in their home environment than in the Inuvik hostels. Our children have as much to learn out of school as in it if they remain here with us.

4. Twice a year our children are flown across the sea to and from Inuvik. This causes us great anxiety. Sometimes we have heard the plane circle in the fog, unable to land, and fly off again. All the children of our community are on that one airplane.

5. We are aware that some other day schools in the Territories have had poor attendance records and have in general fallen short of their desired goals. We can understand the concern of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development about this, but we wish to assure the Department that such an undesirable situation would not occur at Sachs Harbour. As parents we are unanimous in desiring an education for our children; that they should be able to read and write and become competent to take part as fully as possible in the social and economic life of Canada, whether they choose to be trappers or wage earners. So far as attendance is concerned, only the men go out on the traplines, so that the women and children are in the settlement throughout the year. There would be no question of taking the children out of school for periods of the year when families are travelling or camping, although we would be pleased to discuss the possibilities of scheduling the summer break to a time more in keeping with our pattern of life here. To give an example of our interest in education, the missionary here ran a kindergarten for seven weeks this fall, and the attendance was virtually perfect, regardless of faith, despite the fact that it was voluntary and these small children had to walk up to a half a mile in the cold weather to get there.

6. Our interest in a school here extends beyond gradeschool education, and we look forward to the construction of a building that could serve our community in many ways.

There is both a need for and an interest in adult education, and the classrooms could be used at night for this purpose.

We need improved facilities for handicraft production, laundry, repair work, and community meetings and events. Space for such services and activities could usefully be incorporated into the school building.

The facilities supplied to the school such as electricity and water will benefit the entire community.

7. We believe the school is financially justified for several reasons.

Considerable government monies now spent on keeping the children in the Inuvik hostels will be saved. (We understand the annual cost per student is \$1534, which would amount to a saving of almost \$50,000 per year).

Unlike most other NWT communities, ours has a very healthy economy and federal welfare expenditures continue to be minimal. Never has an able-bodied man applied for welfare here.

We understand a new housing programme for the Territories is underway, involving an initial capital investment of almost \$1000 per family and considerably more than that in long term rent subsidies. We now live in very satisfactory houses, the materials for which we ordered and paid for ourselves, and we built these houses with our own labour, receiving no subsidies. We also pay for our own heating oil in full. We therefore request that such monies as would normally have been spent on housing in our community be directed toward the construction of a two room school.

In most communities, furs are traded to the local store, so that the trading concern pays the fur royalty when exporting pelts. We, however, export our furs directly to auction houses in the provinces. Accordingly we have paid, from our own pockets, at least \$15,000 in fur royalties over the last ten years to the federal government, but have received no government capital expenditures as yet.

8. We understand it is no longer the government's policy to construct one room schools. We have tried to show that there is justification for a two room school here, but we would insist that a one room school would be better than no school at all here.

This is our case. We are a self-sufficient community with a prosperous future. Compared to other northern communities, we place no burden on the Territorial administration. We ask for little, but we insist that a two room federal day school is a facility that the administration can quite reasonably be expected to provide our community. We request that action be taken to erect such a school in time for the 1967-68 academic year. If it is too late to get building materials here in time, the Catholic mission here has a large building that would be quite suitable both for classrooms and a teacher's residence in the interim, and the mission would be pleased to rent the building for this purpose.

We thank you for your attention and hope you will see fit to take action on our behalf.

**Appeal to halt oil exploration on Banks Island**  
**submitted on behalf of the Sachs Harbour Community Association**  
**16 July 1970**

Copies of the following telegram were sent to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development in Ottawa. It was signed by the two delegates from Sachs Harbour to the Coppermine Conference of Arctic Native People, and cosigned by all the other delegates.

The Eskimo people of Sachs Harbour Banks Island unanimously and strongly object to any oil or gas exploration on Banks Island. Your government has issued leases for such exploration without any prior consultation whatsoever with the Eskimo people. These actions are an example of your government's continuing complete disregard for the rights of the Eskimo people and are contrary to the standards of common human decency.

The Eskimo people of Banks Island are self sufficient trappers and hunters annually achieving the world's richest white fox harvest and have so used these lands since time immemorial.

Banks Island has a very delicate ecological balance which will be destroyed if exploration is allowed and the land surface disturbed, as your government will readily understand if it will only choose to consult with the Eskimo people and have biologists conduct the necessary research. In contrast to the actions of your government, the Eskimo people have always practised self imposed rigorous conservation measures to maintain the ecology of Banks Island. The Eskimo people cannot understand why your government has authorized such exploration when you continually profess to have concern for the environment of the north.

The people of Sachs Harbour urgently request that you direct that no further exploration take place until consultation can be made with the Eskimo people in these matters. Your government's failure to do so can only be interpreted as conscious consent to the destruction of the people of Sachs Harbour.

So that your government appreciates the seriousness of this situation, the people of Sachs Harbour hereby give clear warning that they are quite prepared to take whatever action is necessary to protect their community and environment.

All of the Eskimo people of the north as evidenced by the representatives' signatures hereto completely support the people of Sachs Harbour in this urgent plea to you.

We also request that your government always have prior consultation with the Eskimo people in respect to any service, exploration, or any other activities intended to be undertaken.

We also ask that your government recognize our rights as aboriginals in the lands of the north and give us fair compensation where there is expropriation of our rights in the lands. We believe that the native people of the north should receive directly a fair share of the resources of the north similar to the proposed settlement being contemplated by the United States Government for the native people of Alaska.

**Reply from the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern  
Development to the request to halt oil exploration on Banks Island,  
5 August 1970**

The following telegram was sent to the Sachs Harbour Community Association in response to their telegram of 16 July, and was signed by the Minister of Indian Affairs.

I wish to acknowledge receipt of your telegram of July 17 concerning oil and gas exploration on Banks Island and other matters. I was surprised to hear that there were still problems concerning oil and gas exploration because I have understood that any concern you might have had had been dispelled at a meeting with oil and gas people in June which meeting was attended by Mr. Dick Hill a departmental official at Inuvik. I appreciate your concern that oil exploration may have an adverse effect on trapping on the island and we are already in the progress of developing regulations which will ensure that there is no significant interference with the natural habitat. These new land use regulations are expected to be in effect later this year but in the meantime we will ensure that any exploration being carried out will conform with the intent of the proposed regulations. You will also be pleased to know that we have arranged for a biologist from the Canadian Wildlife Service to make an assessment of the conditions on Banks Island in the immediate future. You will also be interested in knowing that an ecological study of Banks Island by some 10 scientists is planned for the summer of 1971. 1000 seismographic surveys are in progress at the present time and I am confident that we can resolve any problem concerning hunting and trapping before any such surveys are scheduled to start. I have noted the other points raised in your telegram.

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